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WON BY A HEAD

A Novel.

BY

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"THE SEASON," "THE HUMAN TRAGEDY," "AN ARTIST'S PROOF," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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WON BY A HEAD.

CHAPTER I.

FACE TO FACE.

Copious rain had swiftly followed upon a rapid and successful harvest-home, and the year was doing its best to look young again, but in vain. It had not, however, as yet discovered the futility of contending against time, or resigned itself to that mellow beauty with which alone it now could hope to be adorned. In this, Nature which offers so many points of humiliating contrast, has no advantage over Man. She, too, must make her peace with the unmanageable con-

ditions, if, as the seasons shift, she would continue to enact a useful and becoming part.

Despite the anxiety which hung about him, Sir Everard's nerves were in good order. He had been working more or less to his satisfaction; and when that is the case, it takes a good deal to put a healthy man very much out of love with himself. And then it was just the sort of morning, abnormal in its freshness after the late heavy showers, to inspire him with an additional amount of self-satisfaction. His horse was remarkably brisk, his dog barked and leaped wildly about in front, and Sir Everard felt as though the saddle and he were one, and all the freaks and antics in the world could not dislodge him. After being indulged in his merry morning whims for the first six miles or so, the horse sobered down: he had had enough of it, and now sauntered leisurely along the lanes, Rover likewise evidently glad to take breath and roll along

lazily at their side. The sleepy pace set him pleasantly thinking, more upon the recent subject of his studies than anything else; when, hearing the sound of sharp hoofs, he looked up, and saw some one quickly turning the corner of a lane about sixty yards in front of him. It was Lily Swetenham, and alone; but he immediately caught sight of the groom riding behind, along the hedgerow from which she had just emerged. She saw him and reined in. He of course dashed forward. He felt a little nervous, and was pretty sure that he did not succeed in wholly concealing his state. She was, to all appearance, supremely calm, and received his salutations kindly, but with no betrayal of consciousness that he was the same person in whose hand hers had so long clandestinely lingered but three weeks ago. He was in this difficult position, that he had, without a moment's notice, to begin talking to her upon most unimportant subjects, and at the same time be thinking of others of

immense consequence, and making up his mind as to what he should do. Whilst he was asking after her papa and mamma, commenting on the beauty of the morning, and expressing his pleasure at thus accidentally meeting her, he had to reflect whether or not he was to take advantage of the encounter in order to forward his views and risk his fate. He had never met her in this fortunate fashion before: the opportunity was magnificent, and might never occur again, or at least not occur for months. If he said nothing to her, would she not conclude, and be justified in concluding, that he was quite willing to flirt with her, but had really meant nothing by the tenderness which he had manifested when he last saw her? Judged by his silence, Pemberton had probably been staving off the moment which, from his natural diffidence, he rather dreaded, and had as yet not declared to her his passion. If this were the case, she had of course not yet refused him. Still if

Delafosse, bound in all decency by what had recently taken place between them, and having now the very best opportunity in the world to tell her that he loved her, were to let this opportunity pass, she would necessarily imagine that he did not really care for her at all, and would therefore be very likely to accede to her parents' wishes, and accept Pemberton when he proposed to her, as he probably would—to-morrow, or the day after, or at any rate very shortly. Yes, but had not Delafosse promised not to move in the matter till the other's pretensions were decided? Had they not tossed, and had not Pemberton won? If by any accident, say absence, or the mere putting off of what it was certain would be to him a terrible moment, he had as yet not acted, would he not have grave cause of complaint against Delafosse if, even under favourable circumstances and such great provocation, Delafosse were to act prematurely? He began to think that this meeting which, on the blush

of its happening, he had hastily hailed as the happiest of accidents, was most inopportune, and in fact nothing short of a confounded nuisance. If he now avowed his affection, he violated his word and sullied his honour. If he did not avow it, he would give Lily to understand that he did not entertain it, and so confer upon his rival the one only additional advantage which was required in order to make his success almost certain. His honour *must* remain untainted: but—the devil was in it!—was he to let the girl slip right through his fingers, nay, positively to give her away to somebody else? He had never seen her look so lovely. She sat her horse like a goddess in her own right, and her riding-habit was as flawless as herself. The sky of the blue autumn morning was not brighter than her eyes; there was not a tint on field or brake to touch the colour of her hair; and her delicate clear face, slightly flushed and finished by the subtle air, made the abounding landscape

seem but the appanage and filling-up of her central beauty. What was he to do? Would not most men have blurted out their love? He did not, and would not. He would be true to his word and to Pemberton. All the time that these perplexing considerations were holding troublous congress in his brain, she was looking him through and through; and her gaze, inquisitive as he had never before seen it, helped still more to disconcert him.

At last it struck him that, though he must not breathe a syllable of love, he might go on making it after the fashion of their last meeting. There would no doubt be a difficulty in this; since, though while the groom rode behind, words of affection were the easiest and most natural thing in the world, any other form of demonstration would be not only perplexing, but indiscreet. However, transferring his bridle to his right hand, he held out his left with an expression of admiration of her whip. She at once gave

it him. In returning it, he had intended, and probably showed his intention, to let his hand remain on or near hers. But she withdrew it, and hastily passed *her* bridle into her right hand. Once or twice he ventured on tentative efforts of a similar character, but was always outmanœuvred by skill more perfect, and yet quite as evidently purposed as his own. At the same time her look became, he thought, more searching, and her manner more cold. This would never do. Should he not be justified in telling the whole truth there and then? Surely Pemberton had had time enough? No, no; time was not stated in the contract. Not to wait more than six days—that would be sharp practice indeed. Confound it! why had plaguy Fortune given him an interview with the girl on the only occasion on which he had special reasons for wishing to avoid it? Horace was right; Fortune was indeed "nimium jocosa," too jocose by half, and was playing him a mighty pretty prank this

morning. To crown his confusion, Miss Swetenham said that she must now quicken her pace and be riding homewards.

This announcement, though it crowned his discomfort, also sharpened his wits. All at once it struck him that, supposing Pemberton had proposed, she was not likely to inform him of the fact without being provoked to do so. Perhaps he had. If he had, and she had accepted him, the sooner Delafosse knew it, the better. If he had, and she had refused him, Delafosse was free this very morning. In a moment he had quite recovered his self-possession. Without stop or stammer, out came the words:

"Tell me, Miss Swetenham!"—she raised her beautiful face and looked full at him, as though she was sure that something serious was coming. "Would you ever marry a man whom you did not love, at the instigation of your parents?"

"Never!" she answered incisively.

"Are you sure?"

"So sure, that I once refused to do so."

"Recently?"

"Yesterday."

There was dead silence for might-be half a dozen seconds. She was the first to break it, but she did not now look at him, whilst she spoke.

"It is very regrettable; for I fear it will produce a very long, if not permanent alienation between my parents and me. For the man I am exceedingly grieved, and have only the consolation of knowing that I have all along done my best, or everything that my courage would allow me to do, in order to prevent his ever having to undergo the disappointment."

"You saw then that he would probably do as he has done."

"Clearly saw it; and saw further that papa and mamma encouraged him. They never spoke to me on the subject, so all I could do was to manifest my unwillingness, to the best of my abilities and opportunities.

It seems that I produced no effect, and that they anticipated from me no opposition; I have hitherto been, I suppose and hope, so submissive and obedient a daughter. And now that they encounter my opposition, indeed my unflinching refusal, they treat me, and will, I much fear, continue to treat me, if not with severity, at least with a sensible diminution of kindness."

She frowned the tears back; but he could guess from her voice that they had travelled very close to her eyes.

"What you tell me," he said, "though not without some consolation for me, grieves me much. I can only trust that what I am going to utter will not add to your grief." Again she raised her eyes, and kept them steadfastly fixed on him as he spoke. "Lily, I too love you, and have loved you, if not long, at least for a considerable time, and whilst I have loved you, have loved you without any vacillation. But I saw what you saw, and feared that whilst he of whom

we have been speaking, was not known by your parents to be unacceptable to you, I should have little chance, whatever were my hopes of touching your heart, of gaining their consent." How intently she stared! But he went on. "One difficulty is now removed. Believe me, darling, that I love you from my soul." Her eyes dilated more and more. "Have you not guessed the existence of my love? And tell me, do you return it?"

She withdrew her eyes as he paused, and said very quietly, and almost in a tone of reproach:

"Can you doubt it, Everard?"

His horse already touched hers. He took her hand, which now she let him take. He pressed it fondly; he could do no more. She allowed it to remain in his, but altogether passively. Over her face had stolen a concentrated sadness. It was only natural. Of course, the difficulties of which

he was conscious, were still more present to her. He immediately began to speak of them.

"Was your papa very much annoyed yesterday?"

"Beyond measure," she replied. "He who has always been gentleness itself to me, was severe and, I think, unjust. He told me that I had dissipated the one dream of his life, that I was ungrateful, and that I had quite forfeited his confidence."

"Strange! And what did your mamma say?"

"That she always knew how it would be; and this, you know, is the severest form of condemnation. Papa was to have ridden with me this morning; and on my reminding him of his promise, and asking him if he was not coming, he answered coldly that he was not; without giving any reason. He will never forgive me, I know; yet, what have I done?"

"And how shall *I* be received? I shall

be obliged to acquaint him very soon with what has passed between us; I am bound in honour. And then, my darling, my love for you would prompt me to the same course; I have already suffered enough from doubt and delay. When do you think I had better see him?"

"Must you speak to him at once? I suppose you must. You had, however, better wait for a few days. A week? would that be too long?"

"Perhaps not; but it would be quite long enough. Both he and your mamma have treated me with exceeding kindness, and I will never give them ground for accusation against me—against *us* indeed, Lily dear."

"I fear that matters will only be made worse; that you will be forbidden to come near the house, and that my disgrace will be only the greater."

"Do you wish me to go away and try to forget you?"

"Do you *really* love me?" she answered with a sudden earnestness that amazed and half-alarmed him, and renewing her former intense gaze.

"Yes, my darling! with all the fervour of a boy, with all the fidelity of a man."

"In that case," she answered calmly and half sadly, "I do not, I cannot wish it. Let us hope for the best: I am ready, for you, Everard, to go through the worst."

"Bless you, dearest, I trust you will not be sorely tried."

It was now indeed quite time for her to be riding homewards. They agreed that he should go over to The Slopes in about a week; and that on whatever day he went over, she would do her best to be riding the ensuing morning, in the same direction and at the same hour at which he had met with her to-day. So that if things went wrong, as they very possibly might on his first talk with Mr. Swetenham, he should have a speedy opportunity of letting her know how

matters stood. Under the circumstances, he felt quite justified in making this provident arrangement. He managed to raise her gloved hand to his lips, unseen by the groom, breathed another "God bless you, pet!" and galloped away.

So, it was done. He could no longer have any doubts as to whether she loved him; and all the love which in reality he had for some time had for her, but which he had purposely kept down till he could feel more justified in giving it full play, now came copiously about his heart and flooded his feelings with a new and delicious sensation. True to the rule of life which governed, or which at least he wished to govern, all his actions, he had hitherto forbidden himself the unrestrained indulgence in a sentiment which, whilst perhaps the most pleasing, is certainly the most perilous, of our emotions. Too frequently a witness of that miserable reaction which supplants a single disappointed hope by a general despair, and trans-

forms a winged lover into a crawling cynic, and well aware that he was, by nature, if anything, still more capable than his neighbours of such cruel demoralisation, in proportion as he was more capable than they of deep and ardent attachment, he had not suffered the tone of his mind to be risked until there was strong probability that the throw would be successful. People who have not yet come to see not only the desirability, but the duty, of submitting all emotions, even the highest and most spiritual, to the sober opinion of reason, will probably not only think worse of him, but will deal out to him the epithets of heartless and cold, when I go on to say that had Miss Swetenham accepted Philip Pemberton, or manifested any hesitation in accepting *him*, he would not that self-same evening have been any the less critical about his dinner, or that self-same night have turned a single time more than usual upon his pillow. He would not have been very hard upon Lily

for weaknesses which are yet too common to be treated severely; but he would naturally have thanked Heaven for preserving him from having for wife, a girl who could permit the clandestine companionship of his hand without feeling that she had already thereby given him so much that she would be tainted and dishonoured through life if she were not fortunate enough to give him more.

As it was, however, he could now conscientiously concede to his heart an agreeable liberty such as, in the direction of love, it had never hitherto enjoyed. It was perfectly clear that Lily had felt acutely the signification of an act which, had it ended with itself, would have been in her eyes a grievous indiscretion pregnant with permanent reproach, and in her very answer of "Can you doubt it, Everard?" had shown how completely she had esteemed herself pledged by a partial gift which would have been worse than dubious if it were not to be developed into an entire one. She loved

him thoroughly; and now it had become, not only his pleasure, but his duty likewise, to love her thoroughly in return. *Now*, should all that Shakespeare could ever read in tale or history, unfortunately be verified once more, the curious palate would indeed forget its cunning, and the sound strong sleeper be transformed into the painful watcher of the night.

But he was too glad to be haunted by any such anticipations. Opposition he would unquestionably meet with, but not opposition such as time and patience and tact would not overcome. And just as he was unwilling to embark upon an adventure till he could point to favouring winds, he was quite prepared to encounter and battle with gale, or calm, or hostile breaker, now that he was fairly out at sea.

Joy makes ignoble natures selfish, but noble ones, if not more considerate, at least more anxious that others should participate in their bliss. He found himself at

length, after quiet meditation of some miles in the saddle, not above a quarter of an hour's ride from old Hannah's cottage; and far from feeling inclined, as many would have felt, to care less about Rosie Raffles and her career, and, indeed, to forget her altogether, he thought even more kindly than usual of her brave knack of fighting her own battles, and not more harshly than usual of her peculiar way of fighting them. Not accustomed to regard "what people will say" as at all a rule of conduct, but completely emancipated long ago from all sheerly conventional notions, her choice of residence, which he had never regarded with very severe eyes, he had ceased altogether to question now that it had proved, to all appearance, so innocuous in its results. If, indeed, as he now scarcely thought, she had come down there imagining that she would more easily reach a heart which had made some impression upon hers, the avowal of his engagement would dissi-

pate all such dreams, and leave her free to change or continue her abode as she might think fit. Of course he could not tell her anything to-day. Meanwhile, it would be but kindness to see how she throve in her little solitude.

At the very moment that these benevolent intentions were entering his mind, their industrious object was startled at her work by a sharp hissing sound at the edge of the garden-plot; and, looking out of window, she saw Champion screened, all but the face and arm, by the foliage, and beckoning her to join him. She rose at once and went.

"There is no one here," she said; "you can come in."

He emerged on to the grass and followed her into the house.

"You have come at last," she went on; "though you said you would not. I thought you would come. Do you want any thing, Ambrose?"

"I can probably help you more than you can help me, if you only knew it;" he answered, roughly.

"Really! And how? Do you intend to tell me?"

"Well, yes." He looked about him uneasily. "But I do not like being here. He is just as likely to come in to see you to-day as not. He is out riding, I know. We had better go into the wood."

"I do not think you would be much safer there," she answered; "for if he comes and finds me not in the house and really cares to see me, he would probably stroll in there on the chance of meeting me."

"But he would come in here first, at any rate."

"Yes; and I think the best plan for you will be to come up-stairs. Follow me. From there I can both hear and see when he is coming. The window looks the other way."

Sir Everard was, meanwhile, every stride drawing nearer, and they had not been together above ten minutes when she listened, hurried to the window, and exclaimed:

"Sure enough he is here."

"The devil." He seized his hat. "I will run for it. You know the conditions, then?"

"Yes, yes; but you need not go at all. Indeed, you must not go; there is not time. Stay here quite quietly till he has gone, and you are perfectly safe. I must go down and receive him."

She went to the toilet-table, however, first, shook back her curls, passed the comb through them, saw that she was neat and comely, and hurried down to the sitting-room. She had time, whilst Delafosse was fastening up his horse, to resume her seat at the writing-table; so that when he entered, she had the air of one who had been working uninterruptedly for the last

two or three hours. She leapt up briskly when he opened the door, and declared that she had never been so happy to see him as to-day.

"Why? What has happened?" he asked, with a manner as gay and sprightly as her own.

"Nothing at all," she answered; "absolutely nothing. You see the woods are still here, though beginning to be a little embrowned, old Hannah still alive and my bosom friend, and my industrious self—look here!" and she held up a big bundle of manuscript; "more like the hour-improving bee than ever. The second volume is finished, and this morning I am in my third. And so profound, I think it will puzzle even you."

"Brava, brava!" he exclaimed. "Upon my word it is the pluckiest little Rosie that ever lived."

He had never called her Rosie before, and he called it her now only in a very indirect

way. But he felt himself such a tremendous lord and master this morning—a sort of married man, you know—that he could afford to patronise these young ones, and cover them, by anticipation, with paternal expressions. She took no notice of the familiar word, either by lip or look; but it may be open to question if she did not take advantage of it, and if her putting her hand immediately on his arm, was not the premeditated sequence to his unpremeditated provocation.

"O! Sir Everard, do tell me," she said, as she did so; "you know everything and I know nothing — are foreign women very different from English women?"

"In appearance, of course; in manner, somewhat; at heart, pretty much the same."

"And in intellect?"

"If you speak of the upper classes, usually very inferior, with the exception of some German women."

"But my woman is an Italian."

"What woman?"

"In my book."

"Then you cannot make her too lovely and loving, or too big a fool."

"Charming, charming!" she said; "I will make her all three. How glad I am I came down here! You are invaluable to me, Sir Everard! You solve all my difficulties for me." Then rapidly changing the subject, and coming nearer to him: "How well you look to-day, and how happy!"

"I *am* very well, and tolerably happy; but then you know I generally am."

"Yes, but to-day you look strikingly happy and confident—I had almost said, insolently happy." He laughed, and she went on. "Were you ever unhappy? Did you ever suffer *very* much?"

"I suppose I have had my troubles," he replied, "just like other people; but I do not think I ever suffered very very much. Indeed, I think excessive suffering is not so

much a proof of sensitiveness or of misfortune as of weakness."

"Yes, and you are so strong, so self-reliant. How I do admire strength, calm strength, such as I feel to be yours!"

"I hope you are not crediting me with a greater store of fortitude than I have yet acquired. However, I will own that I do my best to cultivate it."

"How delicious it must be to feel that one can not only bear one's own weight, but another's too, were it necessary."

"Still, I should imagine, Miss Raffles, that leaning was not an unpleasant position."

Again she put her hand upon his arm.

"Do call me Rosie, Sir Everard! You did so once to-day, and——"

"Did I? Upon my word I did not know it. I remember now: I spoke of you as a brave little Rosie. I forgot my manners; it was very rude of me." And he smiled.

"No, it was not; it was kind." Back went the little head and the curls. "You know I look up to you, and how can you help looking down? You will call me by my name?"

"Yes, if you wish it."

"That's all right. And now come and alter this passage for me, which does not sound right."

He sat down with her at the table, and read what she wanted him to read, and quizzed this passage and that, and made kindly merry over what he chose to think funny. She had never known him so full of play before. Indeed he bantered far more than he criticised. But he did suggest two or three alterations which she accepted with profuse acknowledgments, promptly and fully deferring to his judgment in every case. Now, he must go, he said.

Champion heard them come round to the

old paling under the window of the room where he still lay quiet, and heard her say:

"Good-bye, then, Sir Everard. Come soon!"

And heard him reply:

"We shall see. Good-bye—Rosie!"

And in a moment more, horse and rider drave into the forest.

CHAPTER II.

SHADOWS BEFORE.

Of course Delafosse had not left any note at Pemberton's lodge, but on returning home found one from him, in these few brave manly words:

"August 29th.

"Dear Sir Everard,—Whatever may be your fate, mine is sealed. I should advise you, however, to do nothing for a little while; not for my sake, but for your own. I see that I have no chance, and try to hope

that you will succeed better. Please do not come and see me yet a bit.

"Yours very sincerely,

"PHILIP PEMBERTON.

"Sir Everard Delafosse, Bart."

Not only at The Slopes, then, was there a troubled atmosphere. Philip had taken his dear mother's advice, and asked Mr. Swetenham for an opportunity of declaring his affection to Lily, affection which he had entertained for years. Mr. Swetenham knew that; he would speak to Mrs. Swetenham, and she would arrange it all; women did these matters better So Philip found himself alone with Lily in a room that he had been in hundreds of times, but that had never looked so large and empty as it looked now. Philip Pemberton was a gentleman every inch of him, as the above letter would show, and I am not going to make him ridiculous for anybody's amusement. Lily knew what was coming almost as soon as ever he

began, and did her best to stop him at the outset. But it was no use. He remembered his mother's words, that girls like to have a great deal said to them; and so he persisted in saying a great deal, or at least the same thing a great many times over, before she succeeded in convincing him that he had much better never have said any of it. She was very kind, though very calm, assured him that she laid the highest possible value on his friendship, which she trusted she should ever retain, but she sincerely hoped he would never return to the other question, for there was no chance of her ever changing her mind. She promised she would never breathe a word of it to a soul on earth, if he would not—which indeed she begged him to promise never to do.

"It is too late," he said, "or I would promise you anything, Miss Swetenham. Not only do my mother and cousins know what I came over for to-day; but I have your papa and mamma's consent to

what I have done. Indeed, they arranged this morning's meeting, and other people know of it too."

"I am very sorry to hear it," she said. "In that case secresy is impossible. I am very grateful, Philip, for—for—but you will never allude to it again to me, will you? You promise."

The poor fellow promised and departed: very sick at heart, as many a man before has departed, and many a man again will depart, from such dispiriting scenes. Is this one of the evils that flesh is necessarily heir to? and will such lachrymose—well, not lachrymose; let us hope we are too brave for that—but such dolorous journeys, will they always, ever and anon, have to be made along this valley of tears, back from the bourne whence so many a traveller must perforce return? Is it part and parcel of the primeval curse, and can nothing be done to diminish, and indeed annul, the periodic visitations of the everlasting No?

Such is not my opinion, be sure. Men will tell you how corn-laden ships lay fast-bound in foreign harbour, all the while that ravenous little ones prayed for the beautiful white meal that Heaven, their mothers thought, was not good enough to send them; and even now, under the Southern Cross, fat sheep are being boiled down for tallow, whilst beneath the Great Bear, mutton at ninepence a pound is beyond poor folks' stomachs, be they ever so pinched. This one has more than he knows what to do with, and this other just none at all. Liberty has solved many of these economic problems, and will solve the rest if she be only allowed.

Yes, and she can solve all your social and moral problems for you too, O you of little faith! and this perpetual love problem for you among the rest. Of such force is she, and such virtue is there in her straightforward cunning. But then she will do away with your rigid exclusions, and of your

almost as rigid protection she will hear not a word. Neither will she stoop to bargain, nor accept a sliding-scale, adjusted to admit the proscribed qualities, when the superior can no longer be had, or had only at famine prices. She will admit all and protect none. She will throw society wide open, and let each and every one find his and her own other wanted heart without let or hindrance, and abolish for ever and a day all parental and family and sectarian and whatsoever other prejudicial vested interests, whose cry of horror is now raised to drown any more words I may yet have to say.

Let us then content ourselves with noting that Philip Pemberton was for the moment their most prominent victim. Had he not been protected and petted, it is quite sure that it never would have occurred to him to try to get Lily Swetenham; however much and painfully he might continue to want her now that he had been artificially trained to the attempt. Two of his backers,

in the shape of his fair partisan cousins, met him on the road when he was about a quarter of a mile from home. They could not wait, these curious affectionate girls, but must need go and meet the victor half way. But a glance told them that he had been seeking something dearer than glory at worse than the cannon's mouth, and had been hurled back discomfited.

"It's all over," he said mournfully; "all over, Kittie, all over, Deborah. She was very kind, but she does not love me one bit, and I have promised never to name the matter to her again."

"Didn't I say so?" burst out Deborah straight on end: "didn't I——?"

"Well, Deborah, never mind, please, what you said about it. I think the less said, the better. Look here: you go on taking your walk:—no, I would rather be alone. I shall go home and tell your aunt all about it, as I think I ought."

They did as he bade them, going their

way and letting him go his, but both putting their arms around his neck and kissing him affectionately before they parted. They so contrived to bring something rather like moisture into his eyes, and then turned away satisfied, woman-like, at having fresh proof that he had a good heart and was able to suffer. But when they were out of earshot, Deborah recommenced the speech which he had so sadly but peremptorily interrupted.

"Didn't I say so? Didn't I say all along that she is madly in love with Sir Everard Delafosse?—yes, as mad as mad can be; just foolish about him, and that's all. Philip never had the slightest chance with her after *he* came, with his title and his cool swaggering manners, his foreign ways and far-fetched fancies, his absurd stories about brigands and monasteries, and ridiculous ravings about pictures and statues and piazzas and nonsense, that nobody ever heard of before, and never cared to hear.

For my part I hope she'll marry him, and I wish her joy, for they're right well matched. And I'm only sorry that poor dear Philip should ever have bothered his head about her, who's no more worthy of such a man than I am of an archangel."

"I'm very sorry too—*very* sorry," said the quieter sister; "and I quite agree with you that she is not worthy of him, or she would not have refused him. She'll know better some day perhaps, when it's too late——"

"Yes, when it's too late."

"—and live to regret it, and to know an honest man when she sees one. But I am not yet as satisfied as you are that she would have accepted him even if Sir Everard had never come near. She has got some very fine notions, though she does not often let them out, and cousin Philip is a plain country gentleman, with the ways of such, and quite different from hers."

"O, but Kate, if you had seen her the

other night, when I told her about the girl at the cottage, how she coloured and turned away, and how angry she got, you would have seen that something must have passed between her and him. She knows what she is about, trust her. But all I can say is, that if she accepts him without some very good explanation about it—and I don't see what explanation can be given—she will richly deserve to have just such a husband as she will probably get. Except, indeed, that I do not believe she will ever get him at all, for I do not believe Mr. and Mrs. Swetenham will hear of such a thing."

"Neither do I; and I do not think it would be a bad thing to let *them* know about Miss Raffles."

"A capital idea! Of course it would; and then I am sure they would not hear of such a match."

"Indeed," said Kate, "I think it is only one's duty. If Lily herself has not the good sense to be warned by such an intimation as

you gave her, one ought to put those who have the right to control her in possession of the real facts, so that they may save her from her own folly."

Mrs. Pemberton was placidly sitting and awaiting the return of her son, harbouring no doubt as to the result, and only anxious that he should arrive in order that she might bless him. Indeed, when the door opened and Philip entered, she half expected to see Lily enter too. But there was no Lily, and on Philip's face only a legible confession of repulse. She read it at a glance. He said nothing, but came and sat by her side and took her hand.

"Have you seen her?" she asked.

"Yes, mother."

"And—and——"

"She does not love me, mother, and there's an end of it."

"But what did you say to her, Philip?"

"Everything, mother, everything I could

think of. I said ever so much—too much, I fear."

"And she—and Lily?"

"She did not say much, but quite enough to show me that it was hopeless."

"Never mind it, my boy: God knows best. He giveth and he taketh away, you know. It is a pity we did not know earlier, so that it might not have happened. However, you have done what is right, and I hope she behaved nicely."

"She was as kind as it is possible to be," he answered: "very kind—too kind."

"And grateful, I hope."

"Yes, mother, grateful too; though I do not see what there was to be grateful about."

"Yes, my dear boy, there was everything to be grateful for. When a man offers a woman his heart, he offers her his very best, indeed all he has got, and every proper-minded girl is deeply grateful for it, and

should not refuse it without some very good reason. I hope it will not hurt you when I say it; but Lily is such a favourite of mine, and I think so highly of her, that I cannot believe she would refuse you without strong reason, and in your case there can be but one reason, and one reason only."

"And what is that?"

"She loves somebody else, my dear."

"Sir Everard?"

"I think so now, though I never thought so before. And though I may regret that she should love one who, though I have no doubt a very good man in his way, must have some most unhappy notions, and one of whom she can know little or nothing, in preference to one whom she has known from her nursery, and whose notions, I thank God, are all that they ought to be, yet we must be charitable and hope for the best."

"If she loves him, mother, I hope sincerely she will marry him."

The old lady leaned forward and kissed him.

"Spoken like you, Philip; and I am proud to hear you say so. Still I cannot hope *that*, until it be clearly shown that they love each other so much that it would be wrong to separate them. As for you, dear, you have a happy and comfortable home——"

"Yes, mother, very, very."

"—and I am sure you will soon get over any pain you may feel. I am very sorry, but God's will be done!"

"Amen, mother!"

And for the moment they said no more, except that a note must at once be written and posted to Sir Everard Delafosse. What a brave note it was we have already seen; and Delafosse was reading it a second time, about half an hour after his first perusal, out of sheer admiration for its manly tone, when Champion came strolling across the grass towards him.

"There is a fine fellow's letter for you," he said, and held out the note to Champion, who took and read it.

"Yes, not bad. Now, you will try your luck?"

"I have tried it already."

"The devil you have! And with what result?"

"So far, so good. I am loved."

He seemed not so much surprised as startled. Delafosse, for the moment, thought he almost seemed annoyed, and frankly said so.

"Annoyed, my good fellow!" exclaimed the other. "A likely thing indeed! Annoyed! What on earth is there to annoy me? 'So far, so good,' as you say; and I congratulate you. But be cautious as to what you are about. You have avowed your love to Miss Swetenham: you must therefore, I suppose, according to your chivalrous canons, avow it to her father. Indeed, I only wonder and am thankful

that you did not gallop off there and then to The Slopes, and present yourself hand in hand with your newly-acquired prize. Annoyed! Absurd!"

"Very well, very well—you are not annoyed; all right!" said Delafosse, laughing. "But I am not quite the hasty fool you take me for. I am going to wait a week before going to The Slopes at all. The fact is, that old Swetenham has taken her refusal of Pemberton very badly, and is in a tremendous way about it."

"Then a week is a very short time to let his irritation blow over. Too short, too short!"

"Short or long, in a week I shall go and settle the matter one way or the other."

"And if it be decided against you, how then?"

"How then? I shall have to submit, like other people, I suppose, for the moment, and meanwhile hope for better days."

"But if he no longer invites you, or posi-

tively requests that you will discontinue your visits, what will you do?"

"What *can* I do?"

"You will stop away?"

"Of course I shall stop away."

"But shall you not get the girl to try to elope with you?"

"Elope with me? I should think not, indeed. To begin with, quite apart from any other motives and difficulties, she is not of age. Your knowledge of marriage, like your knowledge of a good many things, seems to be drawn from books, not from real life."

Delafosse did not mean it rudely, only argumentatively; but the other immediately answered:

"Of course, I know nothing about it; I rarely do when I differ from you. But if old Swetenham, as you call him, kicks you out of the house, and does not give you the opportunity of saying another word to

her, that will be mighty pleasant for you both."

"But I have arranged to see her out riding the morning after my visit, come what may."

"Have you? Quite right—quite right. I see you are wide awake, after all. Yes, that was the thing to do. Excellent, excellent." And he strode backwards and forwards, and rubbed his hands. "Upon my word, you could not have done better. So that if her father behaves badly, you will tell her the next morning what you intend to do?"

"Precisely."

"And that will be to take leave of her for a time?"

"Yes; till such time as he chooses to come round, which he is sure to do, if we both stand firm."

The week passed on, but very, very slowly. For the first time, in his recent life at least,

Sir Everard was impatient with time, and would have spurred the lazy hours. He had intended not to go again to see Miss Raffles—Rosie now—till after he had finally settled the matter so wearisomely pending. But the days went so slowly, and the one thought so hung about him and harassed him, that on the fourth day he could not keep away from the cottage. There was no earthly harm in going; indeed, his only motive for having intended not to go being his desire, for Rosie's sake, in case she really did care for him, not to see her again till he could tell her that he was engaged to be married. However, what could one visit more matter? She certainly did not talk, or, indeed, act like one whose heart was touched; it was the fault of his own fancy, which could not entirely shake off the conventional disease of imputing matrimonial motives to every feminine mind, and of that masculine vanity whereof he could not hope to be entirely devoid. She wanted

freedom, and, perhaps, his occasional society and advice, and quiet, and the right to do as she liked, and that was all.

She received him in her usual bright happy way. He had come in the very nick of time, she said. Critics complained that authoresses' men were always failures, and she felt that, so far, critics were right. She had a man in hand at present, and she really did not know what he ought to do under the circumstances in which she had placed him.

"What are the circumstances?" he asked.

"Simply these," she said, and began turning over some recently-written pages. "A man loves one woman, and is loved by another. The one whom he loves, does not care much for him, but will marry him on certain conditions. The woman who loves him knows this, though he does not; and she schemes to prevent his marrying her rival. She succeeds, but he finds out at the same time how she succeeded, and the love which drove her to the attempt. He now

also knows that he has lost nothing, indeed gained much, by not marrying the other. What I want to know is, would there be anything improbable or unnatural in making him at length marry *her?*"

"It depends upon the man."

"How?"

"If he were a weak man, it would be natural enough; if he were a strong one, it would be simply ridiculous."

"My man is the weakest of the weak."

"Then marry him to her by all means. Unless," he said, laughing, "you have another woman more scheming still, who cuts her out in turn."

"Now you are laughing at me and my plot."

"Perhaps I am, Rosie," he answered; "but it is much easier to laugh than to devise perplexing and interesting situations."

"How kind of you to come again so soon! I wish you would come every fourth day; I

suppose it is idle to ask you to come oftener. It is just four days since you were here last."

"Well, I don't mind promising, for once, that on the fourth day from this, I will come again."

"Thanks, so much. What does that smile mean?"

"Never mind. Perhaps I will tell you when I come again."

"On Friday that will be."

"Yes, on Friday. Till then, good-bye."

The weather still remained fine, but Delafosse found time pass more rapidly when sitting in his library, than when sauntering in the saddle. Champion continued unusually idle, and was always riding, or out for a stroll. Just as we not unoften see the high spirits of one man crushed by the higher spirits of another, so Sir Everard's industry seemed to moderate Champion's. But the evenings they always spent together over the fire, now become necessary at night with the advent of

September, and they invariably filled a fair portion, and sometimes all, of the postprandial hours with a discussion of the one topic of pre-eminent personal interest. Champion at first adhered to his opposition to Delafosse's speaking to Mr. Swetenham so soon. But on the fourth and fifth days his opposition slackened; and on the sixth, when Sir Everard announced his determination of going over to The Slopes on the morrow, he commended the resolution, and said that he could not do better. And when, the following afternoon a little after four, the horse was brought round, he went to the gate, saw his host start, and sent after him a hearty "Well, good luck, Delafosse!"

CHAPTER III.

DIFFERENT VIEWS.

All that he intended to say, and all that Mr. Swetenham could possibly say in return, had been so thoroughly considered during the past week, that our horseman had nothing to do but give the reins to his steed and destroy distance as rapidly as he could. It had been his usual custom, whenever he went to The Slopes, to ride over about this hour with the intention, always understood, of dining with its inmates in a family way at six o'clock. Such is the pleasant hospitality which yet holds where modern forma-

lity has not too much invaded the good old habits of the country.

When Sir Everard dismounted, and his horse was led away to the stable, his host did not come, as was his wont, to the front door to greet him. But when he entered the drawing-room, there sat Mr. Swetenham, more altered in so short a space of time than any man Delafosse had ever seen. It was not that his features were changed, or that any singular transformation, such as fabulists delight to indulge in, could be distinctly pointed to. But the expression, and still more the manner, but most of all the voice, were marvellously altered. He evidently tried to receive his visitor cordially, but he failed. Mrs. Swetenham also strove to make him welcome, and was, perhaps, more successful, simply because her salutations were ordinarily very much below the demonstrative heartiness of her husband. Very shortly in came Lily, looking more like a statue on

a sort of somnambulistic saunter from off its pedestal, than like warm flesh and blood. She pressed his hand, however, till she almost hurt him.

They went in to dinner. It was awfully dreary. Delafosse was the only person that talked. When, during dessert, Mr. Swetenham rose and walked out of the room, and in again, and about it, and Lily said,

"Papa, dear, have you lost anything?"

He answered with a cold

"No, thank you," and sat down again.

When his guest and he were left alone by the retirement of Mrs. Swetenham and her daughter, he seemed to make a special effort to be his old self again. In vain: all the dear good kindness had gone clean out of his voice. Sir Everard thought he had better say what he had got to say, at once. So he began.

"You have been so kind to me, Mr. Swetenham, ever since you knew me, that I

feel I should not be acting towards you as I ought to act, if I concealed from you any longer that I love your daughter."

An expression of such horrible pain came over his features, that, at the moment, Delafosse would have given worlds to have been able to recal his words. Then he turned deathly pale, drew a long breath, and at last said, with evident difficulty but with terrible distinctness:

"I am very sorry to hear you say so, Sir Everard; and you cause me as much surprise as, I am forced to say it, pain. You say I have behaved kindly to you, and I have certainly done my best, for I liked and like you, as I should think everybody necessarily must. You, on your part, have always been most courteous and agreeable, and are now acting only as I should expect you to act, in the most straightforward and gentlemanly manner, by informing me of your feelings. Nobody, I think, could have suspected them, and certainly I had not the slightest idea

that you entertained such views. But now that you have frankly informed me of them, I will as frankly tell you that you must do your best to abandon them. I hope that we shall remain good friends, and that you will still come to see us; but, of course, only on condition that you never think of my daughter in connexion with marriage—much less that you ever give her the slightest idea of an affection which, in this its early stage it will not be so very difficult to overcome, and which you, like a brave honest man, will, I am sure, soon succeed in overcoming. Your word, Sir Everard, will be quite enough for me: I have so high an opinion of your honour. Give it me, and we need never allude to the subject again."

"But, my dear Mr. Swetenham, your daughter has more than an idea of it already. She knows it."

"And pray, sir!" he said, his whole manner suddenly changing, "when did she come to know it?"

"A week ago, to-day. I met her accidentally and told her."

"And she—she——"

"I am bound to say, requites my affection with hers."

He rose from his chair, and seemed as though he would have had a fit. He could scarce speak for passion. Delafosse took advantage of this momentary impediment caused by his excitement, to assure him that nothing had passed between them before that day save once, and then of such a character as to leave him by no means sure of her affection. He would not listen. He recovered his use of words after a fashion. He did not believe a word of it. Delafosse had been intriguing in a base underhand fashion; they had both been intriguing. He had crept into a gentleman's house, and undermined its peace, and corrupted their daughter. He was a scoundrel, and he would kick him out of the house if he did not leave it at once. The poor bewildered old fellow certainly looked as

though he would attempt violence. Of course the young baronet could have thrown him out of window easily enough; but then he was forty years Sir Everard's senior and—*her* father. If he were to touch Delafosse—and it seemed highly probable that he would—what would Delafosse be able to do? He was far beyond reasoning with; and to have been obliged physically to restrain his violence would have been deplorable. Delafosse hurried out of the house, and went round to the stable. No one was there. The groom was not expecting his departure so early. He hurried on the saddle and bridle himself, as fast as ever he could, and started. Excited as he was, he could distinctly hear Lily singing, "Addio! Convien' partir!"

"Yes, indeed, my poor child!" he exclaimed, "we must part, and in a rougher fashion than even you, for all your singing, imagine."

His horse started off at a gallop, and he

gave him his neck. It was pitch dark, but he knew the road well enough, having travelled it by night often, often: when would he travel it by night again? He never drew rein: on they plunged through the mirk. Just as he turned the lane which led to the main lodge of Batterton, there was a shout.

"Delafosse! Delafosse!"

He drew up.

"What's the row?" the schoolboy phrase coming up to his lips in the hour of unrestrained excitement.

"Nothing: only you need not run over me."

He recognised Champion's voice.

"I was coming to meet you."

"Such a night as this! And on foot! You must have been very anxious to see me."

"You are grateful," he answered. "Of course I was anxious to see you, and hear how you had prospered."

"Well, come home after me, and I will tell you."

And he dashed up the lane.

He was in the library, and had just lit a cigar, when Champion entered.

"Well, is it all right?"

"No, it is all wrong." And Sir Everard described exactly what had taken place.

He was good enough first to roar with laughter at the description of Mr. Swetenham's rage, and then said:

"Upon my word, I don't see what else you could have done. You will see her to-morrow, I suppose?"

"I trust so. That is one comfort."

"You have changed your mind, perhaps? Or are you quite as obstinate as ever in your determination not to run away with her if she will go."

"Quite. And I do not want to hear another word upon *that* subject."

"Very well. And, in fact, if old Sweten-

ham is the style of man he seems to be, you would gain nothing by doing so."

"What do you mean? I should gain the girl—supposing that she were of age; which she happens not to be, as I told you before."

"I did not mean that at all," he answered.

"What did you mean, then?"

"Why, that if she did elope with you, he would never give you a shilling."

"D—n it!" Delafosse exclaimed angrily: "I wish you would not introduce such filthy considerations, which you know, or ought to know, would not influence me a hair's breadth under present circumstances."

"You are cross and rude. I will go to bed."

"Well, go: I think you had better. I want to be alone and quiet."

Champion lit his candle and was walking away, when suddenly he stopped.

"Come now, don't be angry. I will take you at your word and never mention the

subject again after this. But have you *quite* made up your mind not to try to induce her to run away with you?"

"Quite. And all the men and women on earth could not talk me into it."

"Then you are an idiot. Good night."

"Good night."

Delafosse soon followed his guest to bed. But it must be confessed that he did not sleep a wink till morning.

Never had he pulled himself into the saddle with limbs so sluggard and heart so heavy as this beautiful September day, when Nature seemed at length to have laid aside all fretful and feverish regrets, and to have brought herself into harmonious subjection to the mellow advance of age, arraying herself in its appropriate gifts as in the riches of a second dowry. He was glad that Champion did not make his appearance, for he felt mortified, humiliated, and uncheered by reasonable hope. In all probability he was going to have his ride for nothing; since,

judging by the scene of the preceding evening, he was disposed to believe that Mr. Swetenham would now exercise the strictest vigilance over his daughter's movements, and that she would therefore find it quite impossible to keep her appointment with him. And at best, if she did contrive to sally out, attended only by the groom, he would only have to go through a scene of bitter parting which could not, under the circumstances, be made to partake of any of the sweetness of sorrow, or be at once deepened yet mitigated by those tender adieux which shed a permanent comfort round the memory of painful separations. When he arrived at the whereabouts agreed upon for their meeting, he could not catch the glimpse of a figure or the sound of a hoof. He waited some little time. He grew impatient. He felt so satisfied that she would not be able to come, that he was on the point of turning homewards, when, on referring to his watch, he found that it

wanted even some few minutes from the hour appointed. So he waited. Waiting begets waiting. But after twenty minutes more he resolved to turn his face back again to dreary Batterton. He thought he heard a sound. No. Yes, though; surely? A moment more, and the figure of Lily came up over the other summit of the hill-side. They were together. She looked awfully ill, ill even to the marring of her beauty.

"I scarce expected you, dear. Had you no difficulty?"

"None, except in my horse not being ready quite at the time I asked for it. I am very sorry to have kept you waiting."

"Not at all, pet. You know what happened last night?"

"I can guess," she said, "by what happened to me, and by your disappearance. Was papa very violent?"

"Awfully." And he described the brief but startling scene which had passed between them.

"I had to brook the continuance of it. He loaded me with reproaches. But I cannot talk about it: I am utterly and profoundly miserable. What shall you do?" And she looked at him with a peculiar nervousness she had never before displayed.

"Wait and hope, Lily. What more can we do?" Her face grew harder as he said this. "Your papa has forbidden me the house, and to attempt to go near it now and conciliate him by spoken words, would be worse than useless. In a few days I shall write to him, and see what a straightforward simple letter will do."

"It will do nothing," she said. "If he were to relent upon any other point, he will never consent to my marrying *you*, nor even to renewing his acquaintance with you. He might, in time, have more or less got over and forgiven my refusing to marry poor dear Philip Pemberton, but now he connects, and will always connect, my refusal with your interference. In this he is,

of course, wrong; for I suspected their intentions before I knew you—intimately, I mean—and had quite made up my mind that Philip could never be my husband."

"But he will, at last, come to understand this."

"Never. The best that I can ever hope that he will offer me, would be a compromise which—which——" she was dreadfully nervous this morning, he thought—"which, so long as I was—s—sure you—you loved me, I should never accept."

He had come with a determination to use as few fond words as possible, believing that their trouble, which he could not believe would be more than temporary, however long, would so be made more easy to endure. But this last sentence of hers upset him utterly, and made him forget his resolve.

"What compromise, my darling?" he asked.

"A compromise by which I should be

permitted to marry some third person—neither you nor him. It is vain to hope for more."

"But I am bound in honour to say that Philip Pemberton is much too loyal a gentleman to press his suit now that he knows from your own lips it is not agreeable to you. He would never join your papa in such a scheme."

"But it would be done without him, and he could not prevent it. I believe you are right in what you say of him, and am glad to find you so generous to him."

"I am sure he would be so—indeed, he has been so—to me. But I must talk of ourselves. As I say, I will write to your papa. What good it may do, at present, I can scarcely tell. Probably, as you say, none at all. Then we must wait; at least, Lily, if you will."

"Till when?"

"Till he relents."

"He never will."

"Never is a long time. Have faith, sweet! Stranger things have happened. I will stick to you till he does."

The blood rushed suddenly up into her face.

"Everard! I will marry you without his consent. I will go with you where you will —to-day—to-morrow—when you like."

"But, Lily dear, it would be to the last degree unwise. Then, he would never forgive you. The feud would be perpetual. I should have made your parents your deadliest foes, and all for want of, perhaps, a little patience. If you knew how your words move me! But I love you too well to inflict on you such an unnecessary injury."

He went on talking, and still in this affectionate but prudent and deterring strain; but she said no more. At last he asked her if he had not convinced her.

"Quite," she answered.

Do what he could, he could not drag her into more conversation. She seemed to

agree with all that he uttered. And when at last he said that he would always love her, but that for the present they must submit to being separated, she simply remarked:

"I suppose so;" and held out her hand.

They had just turned the corner of a lane, and so for the instant were concealed from the groom. He thought the moment opportune for parting; so he took her hand, bent forward, and tried to draw her towards him to give the only kiss his love had ever had, or would probably have for many a long day to come; saying, meanwhile:

"Good-bye, Lily dearest! Believe me, all will yet be well. We are sure to meet out riding, but it would be unwise to arrange what could easily be discovered, and once discovered would ever after be prevented."

But the position was an awkward one, and if she did not positively draw back, she in no way assisted his intention, which with-

out her assistance could not be completed, but said hurriedly:

"Good-bye, Everard, good-bye—but for ever!" broke into a canter, and dashed away. The groom touched his hat and trotted past, and Delafosse was alone.

He hurried home and sought for Champion. He felt as impatient now to talk the matter over with his guest as he had been anxious in the morning to avoid doing so. He could find him nowhere; but lying on the library table were a few lines, saying that he had received a telegraphic despatch, summoning him to some place which Delafosse for his life could not decipher; that he should be away three or four days, but would certainly be back before the week was over. He had left no further message with the servant, who could only say that a telegram had arrived, which he himself had given to Mr. Champion. This was desperately annoying. At the very moment when Delafosse really

wanted the society of the man who came and went just as he liked, he was denied it. He tried in vain to settle down to work; he could not keep his mind off the one subject. So he gave way and thought it out.

The girl evidently loved him, and she could not love him more than he loved her. She must be frightfully miserable, more so even than himself. What a home hers must have become! How strange that she should have offered to run away with him! Poor child! She had as little idea of the physical as of the social difficulties of the enterprise. And yet he began to be sorry that he had argued against it so absolutely, and had so clearly laid down his resolve not to think of such a scheme. Yet, supposing he had done otherwise? After all, what he had done was best. If she were all that he believed her to be, she would be improved, and her love deepened, by the painful opposition and delay. So likewise would be his. Her father must give in at last; and if, after

decent waiting, he showed no signs of yielding, it would be time enough then to talk about the last argument of all, and to entertain the notion which, it certainly was extremely odd, should have entered Lily's head and been so brusquely avowed by her. What a mess he made of their parting! He wished he had had that one kiss! It would have been something for her to hold on by. But she had started off so abruptly.

By Jove! he had promised to go and see Rosie Raffles to-day. It was Friday, and the day on which he had hoped to be able to tell her that he was engaged. What should he tell her now? He certainly considered himself engaged, but not in a way that would justify him in publishing his engagement. But if he could not tell her that he was engaged to somebody else, ought he to go on visiting her—unless he could make sure that she was not at all in love with him—and so, perhaps, be encouraging a hopeless sentiment in her breast,

which would eventually torture her far more even than a similar but less hopeless one was torturing his and poor darling Lily's. At any rate, he *must* go to-day, for he had promised. And then her bright ways would cheer him, and act as a sort of tonic, of "pick me up," on his terribly downcast condition. She would talk to him of other things, and drive, at least, some of this very dull care away.

He went on foot, that he might stay all the longer when he got there. The horse would not have to be considered—there was no stable of any sort at the cottage—and he would be able to remain till dinner-time. A good deal of the first bad day would so be got over, and in a few days surely he would be more or less right again, and, at any rate, be able to work and think of something else besides this tormenting love business. He entered through the wood, where we once saw Ambrose

Champion enter, walked across the now brown turf and peeped in at the window, expecting to see the curly little head bent over its accustomed work. But the room was empty, and no manuscript even was lying about.

"Rosie! Rosie!" he called. "Miss Raffles!"

But no answer came to his voice, which he was sure could well be heard over the cottage by all but deaf old Hannah.

"What a nuisance!" he said. "I suppose she is rambling in the wood, and no one knows when she will be back. And it is so big, I shall most probably miss her. However, I will try." He started, but immediately turned again. "I might as well ask Hannah what direction she has taken."

He went round and found Hannah sitting quiet in the doorway.

"How are you, Hannah?"

"Ha! Sir Everard! glad to see you, Sir

Everard. Won't you sit down, Sir Everard?" And she dusted an old oak chair with her apron and placed it for him.

"Thank you, Hannah; but I was only taking a stroll, and looked in upon your lodger. Which way has she gone? She's not in-doors, I fancy."

"No, she's not in-doors; not here at least. She left yesterday afternoon, and——"

"Left!"

"Only for a day or two," she said; "and I wish they were over. For the place is quite dull and lonesome like without her, though I made a great fuss at first about her coming, and didn't half like it, Sir Everard, never having had no lodgers, only my eldest son one winter three years sin' come twelfth-tide—him as is dead, Sir Everard. But she's been so little trouble, and so full o' thought, and so kind and familiar like, that it's just as if you took t' fire away on a frosty eve, her going away, it is. And she were always a' singing and a' humming as good as a hive

o' bees, or a whole nest full of throstles. When she wern't working, that is; which I do declare she always were; at it fro' morning to night, till there never seemed no end of it. I wish she were back, and that I do. . . . Eh! but Sir Everard, there's a something for you, Sir Everard; a note tied up—nay, I don't know how it's tied up —but it's lying on t' table in the little room where she always sits a-working and a-working. I'll fetch it, Sir Everard, I'll fetch it."

"Never mind it, Hannah; I will go and look for it. It's on the table, you say. You sit down again. I shall find it without you."

There, on the table, was the little three-cornered note, folded up with such scrupulous exactness as to make it no rapid matter to open it. At last he unfolded it, and read:

"My dear Sir Everard,—I beg you to

come and see me, and then I go away. To-morrow you will come—that is, if you keep your promise—and you will find only this poor little note. I wish I could think you will be disappointed.

"How could I help it? A shilling edition of one of my 'poor and superficial' books is coming out, and they are all quarrelling about it as though it were a boundary question, or one of the Thirty-nine Articles. I alone, they say, can settle this mighty matter by my presence, and prevent litigation. I shall not make a penny by it, and I am sure these liberal people will not even offer to pay the expenses of a journey which I make entirely in their interests. And for this I sacrifice the pleasure of an hour—should I have had an hour?—of your society.

> 'Not that I love man less but' duty 'more
> In these our interviews'

(between myself and publishers I mean). But, soberly, if men are ever just to women,

I shall rise in your esteem for this absence, rather than you will be inclined to think that the charm of your society has sunk in mine.

"And how could I possibly let you know? Batterton Hold and Hannah's cottage are not on visiting terms. The latter is humility itself, and is satisfied with the angel visits of the manorial lord. I would not for worlds have trespassed upon your private domain by taking the note myself (I am sure The Hold is a very wicked place, and there are all sorts of ogres, and cruel giants, and victims' mangled bones in it); and Hannah could not walk a tenth as far, and my maid is busy packing, and then will have to cook my frugal meal.

"So, if you are angry at my not being at home after coaxing you to come, I shall prostrate myself at your feet on my return, and pray pardon at your sovran hands. Oh, how I wish I had not to go! I hope not to be away more than three days at most;

and at any rate I shall be back on the next *fourth*, the period beyond which, by solemn covenant, your absence is never to extend.

"Yours on the wing, but sure to return to the ark,

"ROSIE RAFFLES."

Disappointed and thrown out, as it were, by not seeing her, he could not but admire her for her pluck and business-like readiness to go at once and solve other folks' difficulties for them. It was just like her, just what he should have expected from her brave, confident nature. What a bright, chirpy, easy letter it was! It was all very well for people to say—as of course they would say—that it was not such a letter as a young girl ought to write to a man; in fact, a most improper letter:—that would be the word, no doubt. But the girl who penned those sprightly sentences was not the person to break her heart for long over anybody, or to put herself unwisely and irre-

trievably in anybody's power. Let other people make laws for themselves, and keep them as strictly as they chose. But Rosie evidently knew how to take care of herself, and was as little in love with him as he was with her. Probably, if he were to make honourable suit to her, she liked him quite well enough to be sure to accept it at once; but as he was not going to do anything of the kind, she would remain what she now was, a very happy, industrious young woman, a pleasant companion, and—yes, unquestionably—a valuable friend. He could only say he wished she were here to-day.

He returned home, and sat down and wrote a long letter to Mr. Swetenham. Not with any intention of sending it to him at present, but from sheer want of something to do. And as it bore upon the all-absorbing topic, he got on well enough with it. But when it was finished, and recopied, and read over, it seemed to him scarcely a com-

position likely to soften or convince; it was far too unanswerable for that.

But it was finished, and then there was nothing more to do, to which he could give proper attention. He felt angry with himself that he should be, even for a day, such a slave to external circumstances. He regarded Champion as having done him a positive injustice in going away—selfish brute that he was. Then he laughed at himself, but not for very long, and could only trust that he would be more like a rational being on the morrow.

CHAPTER IV.

A SERMON AND ITS CONSEQUENCES.

Poor Philip Pemberton had not yet taken courage to face, as friend, the fair, lost Lily, whom, but ten days ago, he had wooed as lover. His mother, whose placid demeanour was no measure of her internal emotions, had been ailing during the entire week; and though she did not allow even her son to guess the cause, his disappointment had been made so thoroughly hers, that to it was really to be ascribed the shock to her sensitive organisation. This alone would

have been enough, at her age, to have prevented her from going over to The Slopes. But her inability was seconded by her unwillingness to go until Philip was ready to accompany her. She knew that there was not the slightest fear of the Swetenhams imputing their not calling sooner after the sad incident of Philip's rejection, to any but prudential motives; and the fact that nobody had been over from the vicarage proved that those motives were not only understood in that quarter, but were acting with a like deterring influence. And then Mrs. Pemberton habitually identified herself so thoroughly with her son, that to have gone over to Rymington without him, on the occasion of her first visit after his repulse, would have seemed to her as a practical divorce of his sorrows from hers. Deborah and Kate had been once, during the week; but they had seen only Mrs. Swetenham. Neither Mr. Swetenham nor Lily appeared; the former, in answer to one

inquiry, not being at home, and the latter, in answer to another, not being very well. Miss Deborah did her very best to manœuvre the conversation round to Sir Everard Delafosse, and, in accordance with her plan, to let Mrs. Swetenham know of the barefaced hussy who, with Sir Everard's toleration at the very least, had settled herself, it seemed permanently, in old Hannah's cottage. But she was surprised and mortified to find that Mrs. Swetenham displayed great indifference about the matter, and gave her so little encouragement or assistance by further questioning, that she could not be quite sure that, with all her dexterity, she had left upon the mother's mind any distinct notion of what she was so anxious to convey.

"Wasn't she stupid?" she said to Kate, as they walked back home. "I verily believe she took no heed at all of what I was saying. I suppose she is so occupied and annoyed at what has occurred about

poor Philip, that she thinks of nothing else. I wonder she did not refer to it."

"It would never have done for her to have mentioned it first to us. No doubt she is waiting to see Aunt Mary before she mentions it to anybody else. I do not think Sir Everard has done anything yet."

"I scarcely know, but I almost think not. In that case, we shall have another opportunity of speaking about Miss Raffles."

This conversation, and more to the same effect, was held on the Wednesday afternoon, the day before Sir Everard's final visit to The Slopes, and two days before his parting "for ever," as she had said, with Lily. On the Saturday morning came a brief note for Philip in the following terms:

"The Hold, Batterton,
"Friday, September 7th.

"Dear Mr. Pemberton,—I suppose I owe it to you in courtesy to tell you that, so far, I have not been more successful than

yourself. Mr. Swetenham refuses to receive me in future at his house, or to continue our acquaintance elsewhere.

"To your mother and cousins present my kind regards, and believe me,

"Yours very faithfully,

"EVERARD DELAFOSSE."

Philip handed the letter at once to his mother.

"He says nothing about Lily."

"Perhaps he has not spoken to her."

"I think he must have done, mother. I should not think he is a man who would go, first, to a girl's parents."

"Perhaps not. He has not the old notions," she said quietly. "But if he has spoken to Lily, it is quite clear that she, for her part, accepted him."

"But he does not say so, mother."

"No, he does not say so, Philip, because he is a gentleman——"

"Yes, that he certainly is."

"—and would not like to hurt your feelings by saying so in his letter."

There was a pause, which Mrs. Pemberton was the first to break.

"Do you think you could go over to The Slopes to-day?"

"Alone?"

"No; with me."

"I would rather wait a little longer, if possible. Do you think it necessary to go so soon?"

"It would not have been necessary but for this letter. It is better, my dear boy, that we should face the truth as bravely as possible. As I told you before, Lily's not loving you proves to me that she loves somebody else; and her loving somebody else proves to me—or I should think of her as I should never wish to live to think of her—that somebody else loves her. Who can it be but Sir Everard?"

"Yes, mother dear, I see that."

"Now, this note of his makes me suspect

that Mr. Swetenham has treated Sir Everard as we read that he has, because Lily and he love each other. Why, otherwise, should he be forbidden the house?"

"Yes, exactly. I see that too."

"And if Lily and he do love each other, and her papa knows it, a part at least of his reasons for breaking off all connexion with Sir Everard is, probably, because he is annoyed at her not accepting *you*."

"I should be very sorry for that," said Philip, with simple sincerity.

"I know that, my dear brave boy. You said that you hoped that if Lily and Sir Everard really loved each other, they would be man and wife."

"I say it again, mother."

"So do I, Philip; if they really love each other, that is. And if they do, ought we not to remove what difficulties we can, particularly if those difficulties be, however innocently, of our own creating?"

"Certainly, mother."

"They will have difficulties enough, probably, even when that one is removed; and I cannot hope that they will not; for it is not easy to measure love without them. But let us get rid of the one obstacle that can do good to nobody. That is why I want you to go with me to Rymington to-day."

"But Lily knows already, mother, that I have relinquished all hope."

"But her papa does not."

"Then we are not to see Lily?"

"That depends upon her. We will not ask for her unless you like. We will ask only for Mr. and Mrs. Swetenham."

As it was said, so was it done; and about four o'clock that afternoon Mrs. Pemberton and Philip were sitting in that same room where, ten days before, he poor fellow had listened to a soft sweet voice pronouncing a bitter hard doom. For a long time nobody came, though the servant had said that both Mr. and Mrs. Swetenham were at home. There was not a foot, not a sound, stirring

about the house; no merry throat trilling snatches of melody overhead, no merry hastening tread heard coming along the corridor. Mother and son sat silent, awaiting.

At length the door opened, and Mr. Swetenham entered alone. The quick-eyed, tender-hearted old lady was shocked at the change which had come over him during the brief period since last she had seen him, but she was too considerate to commence her conversation with any allusion to so painful a subject. Throwing all the cheerfulness into her voice that she could command, she said:

"Did you think we were never coming again? Well, you know, wounds must have time to heal, and"—she took hold of her son's hand, for he was sitting close to her on the ottoman—"and I did not like to come without Philip. But the wound is closing now, is it not?"

"Yes, mother," said Philip, trying to emulate his mother's cheerfulness. "I al-

most think we had better say nothing more about it, Mr. Swetenham, except that Lily was very kind, and I am very grateful to her, and we never need talk about it again, and I hope we shall all remain good friends, just as we were before."

She squeezed her son's hand warmly, and said aloud:

"Bravely spoken, Philip. That is as it should be; is it not, Mr. Swetenham?"

"That it is bravely and manfully spoken on Philip's part," answered Mr. Swetenham, with a voice quite new to both, "I quite allow. But I cannot hide from you, whilst thanking you for your generosity, that my daughter"—he always used to call her Lily—"has incurred not only my grave displeasure, but altogether lost my confidence, and does not deserve the honour which your son, Mrs. Pemberton, has paid her."

"But, my dear Mr.——"

"Pardon me for one moment. You do

not know all; I do. Philip is the best judge of what course he should himself pursue; and if he should decide to abandon altogether the pursuit of an object which I know to have been dearer to him even than to me and Mrs. Swetenham, I cannot blame him, however much I may regret his decision."

"I have promised Miss Swetenham to do so," broke in Philip, with the best of intentions, though with the utmost indiscretion.

"At her request, I suppose?" asked Mr. Swetenham.

"Yes," answered Philip faintly; but added with more decision: "I did so, however, most readily. I could not think of refusing her."

"I understand," rejoined Mr. Swetenham, in the same cold, dreary tone of voice. "It is all part of the same scheme. However, nothing more need be said. I trust we shall, as you say, remain good friends, as before,

though I shall always be sorry for the hastiness of your promise, and ashamed of the reason why it was exacted."

Mr. Swetenham had been standing ever since he entered. The old lady rose from her seat at his concluding words, walked quickly up to him, took his hand in both of hers, looked up into his face, and said slowly and with emphasis:

"Mr. Swetenham, you may be quite sure that Lily loves somebody else."

"I know she does," he said with an expression of irrepressible pain on his face. "I know she does, if you choose to call an infatuation clandestinely commenced and clandestinely carried on, by the name of love. But you cannot, Mrs. Pemberton, suppose for an instant that I would sanction such an infatuation: nay, infatuation is not the word for it. Enough, enough. Pray let us say no more. I have already suffered more than I can tell you; suffered in my feelings no less than in my honour."

"But, Mr. Swetenham—my dear Mr. Swetenham—if she loves him? Love, you know, is very very sacred, when it is sincere."

"But not such love as that! Deceit from first to last. Do you think I would have admitted him into my house for a moment, if I had imagined it? A fellow without religion." What pretty names we can give our friends' hitherto tolerated peculiarities, when we come to regard them as our foes! "A fellow without religion, without principle, with a scoundrel for his father, and himself embarrassed up to the eyes! I thoroughly appreciate your excellent motives—both yours and your son's; but I know my duty, Mrs. Pemberton, and I shall do it."

Sorrowfully they took their way homewards; more sorrowfully even than they had come. Their journey, made with the purest and noblest of motives, had been worse than a piteous failure. Love had

taken up the harp of life with a vengeance, and had broken every one of the strings. Philip rejected, Sir Everard exiled, Lily disgraced, father set against child, old friendships troubled, such were the doings of the love which, we are assured, descends from Heaven. Yet let us keep the faith. It does descend from Heaven. But if we take and hamper it with earthly considerations, try to force it to amalgamate with earthly conventionalities, and treat it just as though it were one of our coarse selves and not a delicate, sensitive stranger at all, it does pretty much as all messengers from Heaven do when so treated. It plays a mighty deal of havoc in striving to get itself loose, and then it goes away again.

Whatever might be Miss Deborah's or Miss Kate's real feelings, when they had repeated to them, pretty faithfully, the conversation which we have just heard, they saw clearly enough from their aunt's face, and from Philip's too, that this was not the moment

for triumphing externally over either Lily's or Sir Everard's discomfiture. They were not suffering the woes of either, and they were Philip's staunch grateful cousins and took his side accordingly and stuck to it. They were truly sorry, no doubt, at the pass at which things had arrived; but we can hardly wonder or blame if, in their hearts, they would not have consented to undo it at the price of Philip being thoroughly beaten, and Lily and her grand suitor thoroughly victorious. It was all very well for Philip and his mother to be generous; but they really could not be generous for him, when they themselves had nothing to lose.

The Sabbath bells were chiming over the stubble-fields and the yellowing woods and the thinning hedges, and all the good folks about were trooping towards the ivy-grown tower of Rymington. The bells ceased, and the service commenced, and then at length the moment came for the words of God's

minister from the carven pulpit. But the Vicar stirred not, and the smooth bland fair-haired young curate ascended the steps instead, and read a short colourless exhortation, at the end of which people had finished wondering why Mr. Swetenham had departed from his constant practice, and were fast falling off into a devout slumber. Then they all woke up, prayed again, and were blessed, and made for the old porch. There they lingered for a while, Mrs. Pemberton, and Philip, and Deborah, and Kate, among them; but the Vicar, who invariably came out for Sunday greetings, had retired into the vestry and there remained, and Lily sat in her place in the church, still apparently praying. At length they all went homewards; and wondered among themselves the whole of the early Sunday dinner, why the Vicar had not preached, for he had never been known before, everybody said, not to preach in the morning.

But by-and-by the bells chimed out again,

and hats were taken up and bonnets donned, and children formed into two and two and marched in front, and everybody was once more gathered for afternoon service under the ivy-fastened tower of the quiet old church. Slowly and solemnly from the chancel, when the moment came, looking neither right nor left, but straight out and hard before him, came the Vicar, mounted the pulpit steps, looked down a moment in silence on the congregation, and then spoke.

"Honour thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long in the land which the Lord thy God hath given unto thee."

He held in his hand no book, no paper, no manuscript. He spoke straight out from his heart, and needed no written or printed prompting. They all knew, he said, the words which he had quoted; they had known them from their earliest childhood, as soon as ever they had come to know anything at all. They saw them hung up

in God's holy house, and they heard them solemnly repeated every time they came there to pray. But had they ever really and seriously considered them? They were no mere scriptural formula, to be got by rote and heeded not. They were God's own words, given in thunder and lightning, and perpetual as God himself. They were an inherited command to every generation; and no country, no tribe, no century, was exempt from their authority. All alike were to honour their father and their mother. And why? In order that their days might be long in the land. God, exercising His right of benevolent exhortation, had promised that blessing upon all who, in this particular, should obey His word. But did it not follow that upon all those who refused, in this same particular, to obey Him, a curse instead of a blessing would descend? Were they without examples of both? Let them remember how God had blessed Abraham and Isaac, the first for obeying God, his

heavenly father, and the second for obeying Abraham his earthly father. It was true that Isaac was not actually represented in the sacred Scriptures as assisting his father in the holy obedience. But what they were to gather from the silence of the Old Testament on that point was, that Isaac cheerfully submitted. They were told that his father bound him and prepared him for the sacrifice. Would such have been possible if Isaac had resisted? And if he had resisted, would not the sacred volume have mentioned that resistance? But he did not resist. He obeyed the will of his father, and his days were made long in the land, and God appeared to him and blessed him, and multiplied his seed like the stars of heaven, and in his seed all the nations of the earth were blessed.

But it was not to one sex only that the command was given, nor one sex only that could point to an illustrious scriptural example of filial obedience. When Jephthah

had smitten Ammon from Aroer to Minnith and as far as Abel, having promised the Lord that if victory were given to his hands, whomsoever he met first coming out of the door of his house, the same would he offer up as a sacrifice, he returned unto Mizpeh to his house, and met his only daughter coming out of the house, for he had no other children. Did he attempt to recede from his promise? He rent his garments, we are told, and said: "My daughter, thou hast deceived me, and thou thyself art deceived;" but he added with firmness, "I have opened my mouth to the Lord, and I can do no other thing." Here, unlike the instance of Isaac, the sacred Scriptures were not silent. They were left in no manner of doubt. Perhaps Isaac submitted only passively. But here, probably in order to show that though filial obedience was equally the duty of sons, it was more especially the duty of daughters—ay, even to actively seconding a parent's will—Jephthah's daughter

not only did not avoid the blow, not only did not remain silent and downcast—no; she answered at once, again the Book of Judges told them. "My father, if thou hast opened thy mouth to the Lord, do unto me whatever thou hast promised." And he did to her as he had vowed.

There was no drowsiness, no nodding now. This was something very different from the bland reciting curate. They were simple country folk mostly, this Rymington congregation, and they had simple folks' admiration for a bit of fluent earnest talking. Their Vicar usually contrived to arrest their attention, but they had never been so attentive as to-day, since he had never before been so eloquent. His words were plain and undecorated enough, but they were pronounced with an ardour of manner that stormed their ears and hearts. Why he should, this afternoon, have chosen a threadbare text, and why he should be so earnest and enthralling upon it, none of them guessed, so they kept their big eyes and gaping mouths

all steadily fixed upon the pulpit. Those only who were in the secret, felt uneasy. Poor Philip dared not look up for his life. Mrs. Swetenham closed her eyes when she heard the text, and never once opened them again. Kate looked up and then looked down, and then looked up again, whilst Deborah's eyes strayed alternately from the preacher to the preacher's family pew. But dear placid Mrs. Pemberton fixed her calm, kind, pitying grey eyes on Lily, and never took them off for a second. There she sat, the cause of all this sacred eloquence, white as the flower whose name she bore, white as the marble monument that faced her, and whence she never removed her steadfast gaze. Even her eyelashes seemed not to stir. She was pale and still. That was all.

But he would pass over innumerable instances which rushed upon his memory, and name with reverence the instance of instances, the one pattern for them all, Christ himself. Obedience was not only the con-

stant theme of His discourses, but the unvarying guide of His conduct, from the time when He went down to Nazareth, and was subject to His earthly parents to the time when, in Gethsemane, He finally submitted to the will of His heavenly Father, and prayed, "Not my will, but Thine be done!"

Had God's laws changed? Could learning, or politics, or new ideas, alter God's immutable word? Were they no longer bound to honour their father and their mother, because it was the nineteenth century? Who had absolved them? Not God. Had He again appeared in thunder and lightning, and reversed His commandments? No, the injunction was upon them now as it was in the days of Moses, in the days of Isaac, before it was declared, and in the days of Jephthah's daughter, after it was declared.

But was not the commandment consonant even with human reason? Somebody must be obeyed. The soldier obeyed his

general, the sailor his captain, the subject his king, the clergyman his bishop; and whom must children obey, if not their parents? Let the duty of obedience be done away with, and society would be dissolved. Family ties would go for nothing, subordination would be annihilated, everybody would be his own master, or rather his own slave, and it would no longer be God's orderly world at all, but the Devil's world, full of tumult, and enmities and strife. The duties of children were clear and unmistakable, and if children failed in those duties, then the duties of parents were clear and unmistakable. It was a sad thing, a grievous, melancholy, often a heart-breaking thing, for a parent to be obliged to coerce his child; but if the child would not obey willingly and from a sense of duty, coercion, however painful, must be used.

Let them, then, all pray that they might have loving, docile, obedient children. Let children remember that they might them-

selves some day be parents, and not bring down upon themselves the curse of having undutiful offspring by being themselves undutiful. Let them begin now by honouring father and mother, and then they would be blessed with length of days, or whatever other blessing God, in His inscrutable wisdom, saw best to bestow. But might Heaven, in its mercy, deter them from filial disobedience, which, productive of misery in its origin, eventually culminated in woe and dishonour!

The close of the sermon, and even of the service, made no alteration in Lily's pale, cold, fixed stare. Philip gave just one glance at her, snatched up his hat, and walked with his face in it down the nave, his mother and cousins following closely after. There was no loitering at the door. None of them spoke; but, without a word said, they all four seemed instinctively to feel that they had better go straight home, instead of into the vicarage as, on a Sunday afternoon, was

their usual practice. The congregation scattered in different directions; the children, again grouped two and two, having a worse time of it than they had for many a long day. The slightest irregularity of conduct on their part was encountered by a good sound ready cuff, to prove that if the sermon had been thrown away upon them, it had produced most excellent fruit in their parents. All the mothers declared that it was the finest sermon they had ever heard, and all the fathers said "yes to that." A good many of the youngsters had it all over again when they got home. It was an evening of the strictest discipline. Nine girls spent two hours in the corner, and eleven boys went to bed without any supper. All in all, there were more tears shed that night in Rymington than had been shed there any ten Sundays these last fifty years. The old story, you see. When the mighty chiefs fell out, the poor Argives used to come in for it heavily. And just because a clergy-

man and his daughter could not quite hit it as to whom she should marry, and whom she should not, slobbered little faces and hungry little stomachs were the parochial consequence.

Mrs. Pemberton, who had long since resigned herself to the will of God who had seen fit to take away from her her beloved husband, shed, this afternoon, the first tears which had coursed down her beautiful old placid cheeks since she had learned to check them after that sorrowful event. Kate and Deborah were holding counsel together apart, knowing full well that what they had to say would not at present receive a favourable hearing. Philip held fast by his mother, and noted her quiet but profoundly-stirred sorrowful tears, yet said nothing. Had he spoken, it would have been to take poor fallen Lily's part, and plead that she was not so much in the wrong after all. But he knew that his mother was thinking as he thought, and that she abstained from com-

ment for the same pious reason that he abstained; viz. that it was not their habit to criticise their pastor's words or conduct, at least, aloud. They were too reverential for that. Only at last, Philip took courage to say that he was getting wretched, to think that he should have, however innocently, a leading share in such a miserable state of things. Upon this point his parent gave him what advice she could, and nothing more was said.

It wanted almost a quarter of an hour from nine o'clock, and they were all sitting silent but unoccupied, in the old-fashioned library, which, of an evening, was their favourite resort, when the door opened, and a servant entered, with a face whose look of perplexity they could not fail at once to notice.

"Please, ma'am, the housekeeper and the maid has come over from the vicarage to walk home with Miss Swetenham."

"But did you not tell them that Miss Swetenham was not here?"

"Yes, ma'am; we all tell them so, but they say she must be."

"What nonsense!" exclaimed Deborah.

"Quiet, my dear. You had better ask Mrs. Williams to come in and see me, Margaret."

"Yes, ma'am."

And the girl curtseyed and retired.

"How very strange!" said Philip, with a look of anxiety.

"Some mistake—that is all," said Kate.

"We shall know directly," said Mrs. Pemberton, who had risen. "Mrs. Williams will be able to tell us more about it. Here she is."

"Good evening, Mrs. Pemberton. Good evening, young ladies. Good evening, sir!"

To which a chorus of answering salutations, and the old lady's calm questioning voice.

"Who sent you for Miss Swetenham, Mrs. Williams?"

"Mrs. Swetenham, ma'am. She wished both me and Andrews, the maid, to walk over and bring her back; she said it was getting so late."

"Are you quite sure she said *here?*"

"Quite sure. And where else could it be, ma'am?"

"True," said Philip. "It's very odd. She has not been here at all."

"Not been here at all, sir! So they said in the servants' hall, all of them."

"At what hour was Miss Swetenham supposed to have come here?"

"I don't know at all, ma'am. Those were all the orders we got—to come here and walk back home with her."

"We have not seen her since afternoon service," said Kate.

"And she was then in church," added Deborah.

"Yes, miss, I know that; I saw her my-

self. But where she has been since, I can't say, for I have never left my room all the evening, till I put on my things to walk over here."

"I think I had better—what had I better do, mother?"

"You had better walk back with Mrs. Williams and the maid, and see Mrs. Swetenham yourself, and tell her that we have not seen Lily since service."

He got his hat and stick.

"Let us go at once, Mrs. Williams."

"I am quite ready, sir! I will just go and call Andrews."

"Don't you think, aunt," said Kate, "that Philip had better go on first? He can walk so much faster than either of them."

"Perhaps. Yes, you are right. Go at once, my dear boy. It will all be right, I have no doubt, but go at once, and quickly. God bless you!"

He kissed her, nodded hurriedly to his cousins, and rushed away.

Mrs. Pemberton sat down again in her chair, but failed to look as beautifully placid as usual. Her face was pale and anxious. Her nieces looked at her and at each other, and at last Deborah broke out.

"I don't mind; I have been right all along. She has run away with Sir Everard Delafosse, and that's the long and the short of it."

"You should not say that yet, my dear, for we do not know. Let us hope that it is nothing worse."

"Nothing worse!" exclaimed Deborah.

"Nothing worse!" exclaimed even Kate.

"Yes, my dear; nothing worse. We know nothing, as I said; and therefore we must be content to wait and see."

The meaning was too painfully evident. Not another word was spoken. They sat in helpless suspense.

Philip meanwhile had started on foot at the very top of his speed; a pace which he

soon found he could not maintain. But still he ran and puffed, and puffed and ran, and in mighty short time arrived at the little wire gate from which, four months ago, we first caught sight of Lily Swetenham. He almost tore it open, ran up the garden, burst open the hall door, and rushed into the drawing-room, where Mr. Swetenham was calmly reading, Mrs. Swetenham still more calmly dozing. The lady, startled by the noise of his abrupt entry, woke up straight.

"What is it?" she exclaimed.

"It's I, Mrs. Swetenham. How are you? I—I—I——"

"Why, you are quite out of breath. You must have been running. Is your mother ill? Wait a little till you can speak."

"There, now tell us, Philip," said Mr. Swetenham, who had now also risen.

"I—I—have nothing—nothing to tell you, except that—that we have seen nothing of Miss Swetenham the whole afternoon."

"You haven't!" exclaimed the mother. "I took for granted that she had gone over to you."

"I thought she told you that she was going?" said the father.

"No, she told me nothing. Indeed, I have not seen her since five o'clock."

"But how do you know, my dear, she is not at home all the time?"

"Because we have been to her room, and she never appeared at tea, and nobody has seen her since church."

"Perhaps she is in the church," said Philip timidly, looking at the Vicar, and feeling what signification could be attached to his words.

"Nonsense, Philip! In the church! Absurd."

"We had better see, however," said Mrs. Swetenham. "Indeed, we must see everywhere."

They did "see" everywhere, but all to no purpose. She was not in the church, which

had to be re-opened with the big solid vestry keys, and gone into with taper and lamp. She was not in her own room, nor in anybody else's, nor in the library, nor in the garden, nor in the summer-house, nor under the weeping ash by the river, nor——They *looked* at that, smooth, and calm, and cold, and silently flowing; just looked, and then at each other, but said nothing. Then they all returned to the drawing-room to the Vicar, who had not stirred from the house, but had again resumed his book.

"Well, where was she?" he asked.

"She is nowhere—nowhere to be found," exclaimed his wife, piteously. "Lily has gone,—has gone. Can't you guess where, my dear, can't you guess where? She has run away."

"Run away!" he answered tartly. "Run away, *where?*"

"Run away with *him*, George! Run away with Sir Everard Delafosse!"

CHAPTER V.

ALL IN THE DARK.

Delafosse was sitting and smoking in his study about eleven o'clock that same Sunday night, when his attention was aroused to sounds that, at The Hold, were unusual indeed. All the domestics of his household were far too well aware of his love of quiet and stillness to allow their voices ever to reach his ears save when they were addressed directly to him. He held the cigar suspended in his hand, and listened. A row was going on in the house somewhere, that was certain. The altercation grew

louder, louder. Then it came nearer; rapidly, rapidly nearer. The door of the study was thrown violently open; and in rushed Mr. Swetenham, in a state of excitement greater even than he had last seen him, and Philip Pemberton close at his heels and holding him by the arm as if to keep him back.

"My daughter!" shouted the old man: "my daughter! this instant, sir! Where is my daughter? I insist—I will—she is here—I know she is here. I will not—you—you——"

"Your daughter, Mr. Swetenham!" said the young baronet, quietly, "is *not* here; and I am now the last person in the world to be able to tell you where she is, if she be not at her own home!"

"Her own home, sir! I will not be put off by your—your—— I will search the house—you—you have—you know you have—you rode—I know you rode with her on—on—on Friday morning—you you——"

"I saw Miss Swetenham on Friday morning last, and said good-bye to her, since you did not see fit to give me any better opportunity. I have neither seen her nor heard of her since."

"I don't believe a word of it, sir! I will search your house: I will—I—I——"

"But, my dear Mr.——" interposed Pemberton, again taking hold of his arm. But the poor infuriated old gentleman rudely shook him off.

"Let him go," Delafosse murmured to Pemberton. And away he went, stamping up and down the echoing rooms and corridors.

"What has happened? Tell me: has Miss Swetenham really left The Slopes?"

"Yes. We were all sitting quietly at home about a couple of hours ago, very sad and very silent, not only on account of what has happened, but also on account of a strange sermon which Mr. Swetenham preached this afternoon——"

"What about?"

"Upon the fifth commandment—all meant for Lily—when in came the servant to say the housekeeper and maid had arrived from the vicarage to accompany Miss Swetenham home."

"Who was with you, then."

"Who was not with us at all, and had not been during the day, and indeed for a good many days."

"Had she said at The Slopes," asked Delafosse hastily, "that she was going over to you?"

"No: not a word. Mrs. Swetenham merely supposed, from her not being at home, that she had walked over to our house."

"But where did they last see her?"

"In church: about five o'clock, or a little before. We all saw her then; but nobody seems to have seen her since."

"Good God! *You* surely do not doubt that I know nothing about it?"

"Do you assure me, Sir Everard, that you do not?"

"My honour on it. I never was more amazed in my life. You believe me?"

"Most certainly. Understand that *I* have not come here to seek her. I came, because Mr. Swetenham wished me to come with him, and I did not think he was fit to come alone."

"How have you come?"

"On horseback. Hark! he returns. Be as patient with him, Sir Everard, as you can. He is half out of his mind."

In he came, resuming his terribly offensive words and manner. Delafosse could stand it no longer.

"Enough, enough, Mr. Swetenham! You outraged me in your own house, and I bore it. You come, when I am made utterly miserable by your treatment of me and of your daughter, to insult me in my own. You will some day regret it. For Heaven's sake, Pemberton, take him away."

At length, though with the greatest difficulty, he succeeded in doing so; and Delafosse heard their horses dashing through the night. He went to the hall door and looked out. It was dark as a wolf's throat, and rain was beginning to fall. It and the night air cooled and refreshed him. Very shortly, it poured. The wild horsemen would be drenched to the skin.

He went back and lit another cigar. What better could he do? Do you think he did not care for Lily? He would have shed every drop of blood in his veins for her at that moment, in any painful way you like. I tell you he was madly fond of her, now. But again, what was he to do? To tear about the soppy country lanes in the blind dark, without purpose, without hope? Was it not wiser, better, manlier, more soundly loving, to go and sit quietly by the blaze and think the matter out? Supposing that she had really and intentionally left her home, he and all the king's horses and all

the king's men could do nothing till morning.

The whole of to-day and the whole of yesterday had been spent in a manner that he did not like to think of; they were the two days of his life of which he felt the most ashamed. He had done absolutely nothing. He had not imagined it possible for himself to be made so miserable, or life so little tolerable. He had slept badly and eaten worse. He could drink and he could smoke, but nothing else. He was almost glad that something—even this sad bewildering something—had come to rouse him and occupy his faculties afresh.

Why had she gone from home so suddenly? and where had she gone? She surely had not—not——He stamped his foot. Merciful Heaven! Not that, surely not that! His brain seemed to take fire, and his hands and feet grew icy cold. He shook off the terrible dread. If she had really gone away, she would surely let him

know. He was sure she loved him; and if she did not know that he loved her, she was difficult to convince. Fool! dolt! why had he not consented to carry her off from home as she had wished, be the consequences what they might? He did not go to bed: was it likely that he should? But the night spent thus wakefully, went almost as fast as when spent in the swift whirl of sleep. The day was coming. He would go up to London by the first train, put all the most likely mechanism in motion, and move heaven and earth to find her. Pemberton would make inquiries in the neighbourhood with much better chances of success than himself. There had been no train on this line to town since the mail at 9.10 P.M., the preceding evening. Special trains in their locality, and particularly on a Sunday night, were quite beyond anybody's reach. So that no opportunity of pursuit, supposing that she had made for the metropolis—and there was not the slightest reason to suppose that she had

—had been thrown away, by his passive waiting during the wet wakeful night.

The morning advanced, and he was starting for the station.

"Your letters, sir!" shouted the gardener after him.

"The postman is early this morning."

"Yes, he always is in good time of a Monday, Sir Everard."

He thrust the letters into his breast-pocket, and drove off again. Not till he was in the train did he open them. The third he opened, like the rest, without any suspicion. But, to his surprise and delight, it ran thus:

"September 8th.

"I beg of you to come to London at once. If you do not find me at 14, Northumberland-street, Strand, wait for me to-morrow at the bottom of St. James's-street, at 8 P.M.

"LILY."

But how was this? It could not come from London. In the first place there had not been time for her to get there and write; and in the second no letter left London on Sundays. He looked at the envelope. There was no London postmark; but what the postmark was, he could not for his life make out. It was not Rymington or anything like it, or any other village in the neighbourhood he could think of. In fact, it was, as country postmarks constantly are when there is nothing in the letters themselves to assist one to guess, utterly and hopelessly illegible. After all, it was not of any particular consequence. He should soon see Lily herself, and everything would be explained.

He had plenty of time to revolve these few lines in his mind, and to shape his resolve. His mind was now made up to accept her cause as his own, to annihilate two griefs, and unite two fates. He might still regret and disapprove the course which Lily

had taken; but what course save one was now open to *him?* Were he to seek out Mr. Swetenham—and he should now probably have considerable difficulty in finding him—he would simply regard the whole occurrence as a cleverly concocted scheme by which he was to be induced to relent, would recover possession of Lily, and send her lover again packing. He would only be betraying her, crushing himself, and condemning both to redoubled and probably permanent misery. His conscience acquitted him now. He would marry her, if he could. The legal difficulties, which had had some share in his original decision, and which still existed, were not difficulties that could not be overcome. They were difficulties, but nothing more. Besides, he was now in this altered position; even though he married her, yet a minor, he had not only had no share in enticing her from her home, but she had left it in the teeth of his wishes and

of his refusal to countenance the notion or to co-operate with her in its execution.

The moment that he reached the terminus, he leaped into a Hansom, and dashed off to Northumberland-street, still wondering why she had hit upon that particular spot. Twenty minutes would show. O this London traffic ! There was a stoppage at every turn. How slowly they made their way! At last they were in the Strand. There, the block was thicker still. But at length the cab turned out of the throng, and he was rattling along Northumberland-street.

"Number fourteen, cabby!"

"All right, sir!"

The Hansom pulled up. He jumped out, and gave a knock that made the street ring again. The summons was answered by a slatternly young woman, who evidently thought that he need not have made such a row.

"Is Miss Swetenham at home?"

"Miss Sweten—— What did you say?"

"Miss Swetenham: is she in?"

"Miss Swetenham. Never heard o' such a person. She don't live ee—e—re."

"Do you not take in lodgers?"

"Yes: but we ain't got no Miss Swetenham staying in the 'ouse."

"Whom have you got?" he asked, impatiently.

"No one."

"But I thought you said you let your rooms."

"So we do. But we haven't none o' them let at present; no, nor haven't had these three weeks."

"Then you can take me in?"

"O—oh! If that's it. Mrs. Croucher! Mrs. Croucher! Here's a gentleman wants ——*She*'ll tell you all about it."

And his first attendant shuffled up the passage, leaving him to return the obeisances of the landlady.

"You want rooms, sir? Drawing-room

floor, sir? Very quiet, very pretty, and so clean."

"Is nobody staying here?"

"Nobody just now, sir! You see, sir, it's our slack time. London empty, like. Will you walk up-stairs? How long shall you want the rooms for, sir? Two guineas a week, these, sir!"

"I shall want them only for a day or two. To tell the truth, I expected to find an acquaintance of mine here already."

"Haven't had anybody in the house, I'm sorry to say, sir, for nearly a month."

"And no applications?"

"Not one."

"Is there a letter for me, do you think? Sir Everard Delafosse."

At the sound of the title she curtseyed, as becomes a respectable Englishwoman, and threw additional deference into her manner.

"No, Sir Everard! I'm very sorry, Sir Everard: but I'm pretty sure there's not."

"And no inquiry been made for me, to-day or yesterday?"

"I'll see, Sir Everard: though I should have been sure to have heard of it if there had been. . . . Sa—a—arah! Any inquiry been made to-day or yesterday for Sir Everard——"

"Delafosse,"

—"For Sir Everard Delafosse?"

"No: that I'm sure there ain't," shouted Sarah from below. "Not a blessed soul been about the place, but the same gent as is allers a' callin' about the capt'in what left without paying you nor me, nor the washer-woman, nor nobody."

"There does not seem to have been any inquiries for you, Sir Everard. Shall I take your things up-stairs?"

"Yes, I suppose so. It's very odd."

He sat down by the drawing-room window. It was difficult to say whether it rained or not. It wanted just twenty minutes from two, and here he must wait

till a quarter before eight, unless Lily made her appearance in the mean while. He could not have read the note wrongly? It bore the date of the previous day, and it spoke of to-morrow? Northumberland-street was as plainly written on it as it was printed in staring capitals on the wall opposite; and fourteen was as legible and unquestionable as the name. Was this number fourteen? He went down stairs, opened the front door, and made assurance doubly sure. Perhaps Lily had made a mistake in the number. He went out and walked up and down the street in the drizzle for a couple of hours. Mrs. Croucher began to think that he was mad; and the opinion must have been shared by the young woman with the baby at twenty-nine, and the bald old gentleman with the newspaper at forty-one. Supposing, however, that there had been a mistake in the number, making himself visible to all the inmates of all the houses was the best possible way of counteracting it. The young

woman and baby kept appearing and disappearing, and the old gentleman at last emerged from the house and walked away. These excepted, there were no signs of resident population. Some niggers walked down the street, but there was no high-spirited public, indeed no public at all, and off they went again without so much as a joke or a rattle of the castanets. Half an hour later came an organ with a monkey. The young woman and baby flattened their noses against the panes of twenty-nine, and tried to look as much like a large audience as possible, but it was a failure. Pan and his pipes disappeared with never a note. And Lily did not come. And, all the furies take it! would eight o'clock never arrive?

Seven o'clock did, at any rate. And, giving ludicrously strict injunctions to Mrs. Croucher and Sarah that if anybody—man, woman, or child—asked for him in his absence, he, she, or it was on no account to be allowed to leave the premises till his

return, he strode off to the bottom of St. James's-street, arriving there just three-quarters of an hour before the time mentioned in Lily's extraordinary note. However, being three-quarters of an hour before time was being on the safe side. How slowly the minutes on the face of the palace clock did move! Still, hope, indeed more than hope, certainly revived in his breast. The note had not said that she would be at Northumberland-street. It had merely asked him to go there, and if she were not there, to be at the bottom of St. James's-street at eight o'clock. More than that: he was to "wait for her" there. So that it was quite sure she herself would come. No doubt there was some good reason for her not being at Northumberland-street, which she would explain when she arrived. Twenty-five minutes to eight: only twenty-five minutes more. Where should he take her to when she arrived? He could not take her to Northumberland-street, or to

any other lodgings, for that matter. What would be the best thing to do? He knew. He would take her to Montagu's. Countess would stand by him in his difficulty, he was sure. He hoped to goodness they had got back from Shinglesea. Only seventeen minutes now. He began to feel, though, as if everybody was looking at him, and at last felt inclined to resent it. One man in particular, he considered, stared harder than the rest; and he was just on the point of saying, "What the devil is it to you, sir, if I choose to stand here?" when a Hansom suddenly drew up alongside, and out of it jumped a commissionnaire, looked round, begged his pardon, but was his name Sir Everard Delafosse? Being assured that it was, he handed a note. Delafosse hastily broke the seal, and read:

"Be at the same place, at the same hour, to-morrow. I beg of you.

"LILY."

"Any answer, sir?"

"Answer! There's no address. I don't know what to make of it. Who gave you this note?"

"A lad in the street."

"Where?"

"Up at Kensington, sir. I was just coming down to the Army and Navy for a gentleman; so I thought I could do both jobs together."

"Where did the lad live? Where did he come from?"

"Haven't the least idea, sir. He gave me the note and a shilling, that's all. Beg your pardon, sir; but the message to the Rag's very partic'lar, and I must be off."

He jumped into the Hansom.

"Whereabouts at Kensington?"

"Hard by the Terrace, sir."

"D—n—t—n!" Was there ever such a business? He hurried back to Northumberland-street. Had anybody called? No one. Then he had another day to spend.

Was Lily deceiving him? What could she be doing? And where could she be doing it? Why should he not go at once to Montagu's? He would have the benefit of friendly advice, and the pleasure and comfort of seeing them. Spend the remainder of the evening in Northumberland-street he could not. Again he gave Mrs. Croucher the most strict and definite orders, as also Narracott's address, and away he rushed.

CHAPTER VI.

FRIENDS IN NEED.

When he arrived at his destination he found a cab at the door, from which a pile of luggage was being removed by the man. Nobody else was visible, but both the garden and the house doors were open, and he entered. He passed through the hall into the drawing-room, where, at the window, with her bonnet and travelling cloak on, and with her back to him, stood Mrs. Narracott.

"Countess!"

She turned.

"You here, Sir Everard! How do you do?" she said, in a stately way.

"How are you?" he answered, hurrying forward, and grasping her hand with his accustomed cordiality, a cordiality, however, which he at once perceived she did not return. "I am so delighted to see you again."

"Are you?" she said, in the same curt, cold way.

"Why, of course, I am. Why did you not come to stay with me instead of going down to mope at the sea-side?"

"We did not mope at all. I never enjoyed myself more in my life," she answered.

He could tell easily enough, from her answer, not only that something was wrong, but that she had been as wearied and miserable at Shinglesea as it was possible for woman to be.

"But why did neither of you write to me? You know I wanted you so much to come to The Hold."

"A likely thing, indeed!" she said, pulling off her glove, and then walked calmly out of the room.

"Well, this is pleasant," he exclaimed, the instant he was alone.

In a minute or less, a heavy step was heard coming down stairs, and in came Montagu.

"Well, old boy, how are you?"

He, at least, was as cordial as ever.

"I'll tell you directly. But whatever is the matter?"

"With whom?"

"With your wife."

"Has she been rude to you? Just like 'em all. I thought she would."

"I cannot say she has been rude; but she received me as though I had done her or you some terrible injury, and then walked quietly out of the room and left me."

"They're all alike," said Montagu, "always with their backs up."

"But, why with *me?*"

"O, some wretched nonsense. Never mind her. She'll come round."

"But I must mind her. Tell me; what is it?"

"Giving up old friends for new ones, she says."

"You are the old ones, I conclude. Who may the new ones be?"

Poor Montagu looked rather ashamed of himself.

"It's all a parcel of rubbish; but she means Rosie Raffles. Now, though I frankly own that I think it is a very unwise thing of you, old boy, to ask her down to you or near you, in the way in which you have done, you must not suppose for a moment that *I* mind, or that *I* am jealous, or any nonsense of that sort. But women are different; a rum lot, old fellow, as you know; and my wife's not the least wonderful of them."

"Was that your reason for not coming to see me?"

"Well, yes, it was. And though you have a perfect right to ask whom you like, into your house or out of it, I don't think we could have come down to you, whilst she was there alone, and at your request."

"In the first place, my dear Montagu, I did not ask her there at all."

"You didn't?"

"Certainly not. And in the second place, I did not even know that she was there till after I had asked you and you had refused. It was by mere accident, indeed, that I discovered she was there."

"That's odd enough."

"Why? I do not see the oddity."

"Because you do not know that she gave us to understand that you yourself had asked her down there."

"That's impossible. Some women are bad hands at telling the exact truth; but

they rarely venture on a good bold lie. What really occurred was this. Here, in this room, where, as you remember, I first met her——"

"And spent all the evening on the balcony, you rascal," interrupted Montagu, laughing.

"—and spent all the evening on the balcony, if you like—that evening, when we were talking about writing in general——"

"And hers in particular, eh, old boy?"

"Well, and hers in particular, I happened to say that the quiet and solitude of the country were more favourable for composition than the din and dust of London."

"Was that all?"

"Not all by any means. Then I went on to banter her, and advised her to bury herself in a howling wilderness."

"Batterton, for instance."

"Where was there one? she asked. In lots of places, I answered. There was one on my estate, the very spot. As you may suppose, I said it in sheer playfulness, and

never gave the thing a thought, until, some weeks after, I found the young lady hard at work, at old Hannah's cottage."

"Well, they *are* an extraordinary lot," said Montagu, pulling himself together with his usual gesticulation; "just incomprehensible, and that's all about them. I'll lay a wager that Rosie Raffles did not wander much, if at all, from mere verbal truth, and yet she contrived to leave us under the impression that she had received a direct invitation from you."

"A case of lying like truth, and yet most truly lying. The fact is, old boy, your wife helped Rosie to take her in. She was prepared to believe that I had given her the invitation, and construed the other's words accordingly. I declare I think poor Rosie quite innocent!"

Narracott turned and stared hard as Sir Everard pronounced these last words. Then he said:

"I will go for my wife; she will be able

to help us and tell us exactly what passed. *I* don't pretend to remember a single word of it."

"Of course not. But stay, Montagu; never mind going for Countess at present. Tell her what I have told you, and she'll be satisfied, I am sure. I have something far more important to talk to you about."

"All right. What is it?"

"Not to go into a long story which you and your wife shall have some other time, the week before last I met Miss Swetenham out riding, and proposed to her."

"Yes?"

"She accepted me."

"Of course she did. And the governor?"

"Would not hear of it; stormed like a madman, turned me out of his house, and told me never to go near it again."

"The deuce he did."

"You never saw anything like it. I met her the next day out riding, and we took our adieux for the present, I vowing to be

faithful till her father gave in. By Jove! she offered, then and there, to run away with me, saying that waiting would do no good, and that her papa would never alter his mind. However, I thought it right that we should give him a trial. We parted, her last words, oddly enough, being 'Good-bye, but for ever.' That was last Friday."

"But how about Pemberton?"

"I will tell you more about that, later; but he had proposed and been refused, and that made old Swetenham more furious. Well, on Sunday night——"

"Last night?"

"Yes, last night. I was sitting smoking, when he and Pemberton burst into my room. Lily had run away from home, and her father would have it, and I dare say will have it still, that I have got hold of her."

"And you know nothing of it?"

"I did not know anything, then, and how much I know now, remains to be seen. Just when I was starting from home this

morning, I got that note with my other letters. Read it."

Narracott read it.

"And have you seen her?"

"Not yet. She was not in Northumberland-street, nor had she been there."

"But St. James's-street?"

"I went there, of course; and the only result was a second note—here it is, see—given me by a commissionnaire who had got it from a lad in the street, and could tell me nothing more about it."

"How very singular! I must go and tell my wife, now. I'll come back to you directly."

He went and told her what he had just heard from Delafosse. To the first part, about Rosie Raffles, she listened with an air of assumed indifference, and did not seem much impressed with the explanation. But when she had heard all about Lily and the present perplexity, she ran down stairs at once, entered the drawing-room with a very

different face from that with which she had left it, held out her hand cordially, and said with affectionate simplicity:

"I am so sorry, Sir Everard, to hear what Montagu tells me. I am sure you must be in a state of terrible anxiety. Sit down and let us talk it over."

There was no reference whatsoever to the other question. Whether that was to be fought out later, remained to be seen; but, for the present, it was enough for Countess that her friend was in a difficulty, and enough for him to note that she was evidently ready to help him if she could.

"So you think I do love Lily now?" he asked, with a smile that played but poorly on his eager excited face.

"If you do not, you ought to do," she answered quickly. "But it would have been better perhaps if you had loved her as ardently a little earlier."

"That was impossible. But do not let us talk about that."

"Well, we won't. But why did you refuse to run away with her?"

"Because I thought and still think it unwise, if not wrong."

"But what will you do now?"

"That is another matter. Mr. Swetenham must have behaved so badly to her, and she seems so determined about it, that of course I will marry her at once, if I can."

"Show me those two notes."

He showed her them. She was as little able as himself or as Montagu to give any opinion upon them with certainty. They spent the remainder of the evening in conjectures, many plausible, none certain, and, therefore, none worth recording. All that seemed so probable as to be almost beyond doubt was this: that she knew herself to be pursued by others besides her lover, that she was determined to evade them, and that she was thereby forced meanwhile to keep him dangling. He must be as patient as he

could till he met her, and then act with decision and rapidity. Of course he might bring Lily to their house the moment he got hold of her. Countess would receive her with open arms, would make her comfortable and at ease, and would keep her hidden from everybody. Montagu, meanwhile, would make all the necessary practical arrangements, whilst Delafosse went away and lay concealed at some out of the way spot at the sea-side. Lily not being of age, they could not be married by license; but Montagu would find the right place and parson where they might all go and reside, and have the banns published, for the necessary time. Nobody would then be able to say a word against the manner in which the whole affair had been conducted. Sir Everard and his lovely runaway should be married as properly as the most respectable of them.

Delafosse felt all his old fine defiant spirits revive under these pleasant anticipations. He had been so harassed by the events of

the last few days, that even the expectation of meeting Lily had not at first stirred up that sense of joy which would otherwise have been its natural result; it had only deepened his anxiety. But now the cheery confident voice of Montagu, and the calm yet warm and affectionate promises and encouragement of Mrs. Narracott, acted upon him like a sudden flood of sunshine. They sat in Montagu's study late into the night, the two men smoking, the lady braving the tobacco fumes, and all three keenly discussing the one topic, from which they never wandered. What place should it be? In England or Scotland, or the green isle? Or should it be the Hebrides? Why not the Scilly Isles? And would not the wedding-breakfast, consisting of themselves, the bride, and the excellent clergyman—they wondered what he would be like—be the most delightful and laughable thing in the world? Would not old Swetenham stare, said Montagu, when they sent him an Orkney paper

with the announcement in it of his daughter's marriage.

They wanted Sir Everard to stay and sleep at their house; Northumberland-street would be so deadly dreary. That was all very well and true enough; but to Northumberland-street, dreary or not dreary, he must go, and there remain the whole of to-morrow, for fear anything should happen. Perhaps it was the best plan. Nothing like being safe. Montagu would call and see him at about mid-day.

Mrs. Croucher and Sarah had long since gone to bed, when he arrived at number fourteen. He let himself in with his latch key, lit the bed-room candle, and looked on every shelf, and possible wooden protuberance in the hall and on the staircase, and on every table and piece of side furniture both in his sitting-room and bed-room, to see if there was not a letter for him to enlighten him on a subject so horribly dark. But he looked in vain.

The very first thing he did, on waking the next morning, was to ring the bell and inquire if anybody had called yesterday evening during his absence. Not a soul.

Was there ever such a business? Then he had another day to spend. With the exception of the hour that Montagu passed with him, he spent it in Hansom cabs between "hard by the Terrace, Kensington" and Northumberland-street, staring wildly out of window all the way. Not to make the day seem as long to you as it seemed to him, we will have it half-past seven, P.M., and him posted again at the bottom of St. James's-street. The passers by were, if anything, still more offensive than on the preceding evening. He stayed there till half-past nine, till ten, till eleven, till midnight; he did not get so much as a note even from a commissionnaire. Then he jumped into a Hansom, and bade the fellow drive as fast as fate to Montagu Narracott's.

"Not a bit of use. Haven't seen her or anybody belonging to her."

"You don't say so! What an extraordinary thing!"

"Her father must have found her," said Mrs. Narracott.

"Do you think so?" he answered. That had evidently never occurred to him. "It will make no difference now, though—except, perhaps, of a little delay. By Heaven! but he'll have to put her under lock and key, and get a company of the Household troops to mount guard over her, if he means to prevent me from carrying her off under his very nose, now."

Countess held out her hand once more.

"I like to hear you talk like that. I knew it was in you, even at the time that I used to taunt you with your prudence and caution. And if we three cannot outwit them yet, we are not good for much, indeed for anything at all."

Brave, loyal, lovable, dear Countess! She was not going to have this accomplished, gentlemanly, valuable admirer of hers turning his back upon her, for so much as a moment, for your Rosie Raffles, or any dozen such feminine free lances. Yes, she was jealous of him to that extent; and though she might not choose to own as much in words to him or anybody, she took no pains to conceal it—as why should she?—even from Montagu. But the moment that *the* maiden came, and Sir Everard doffed Love's leal plume in amorous earnest, then was she with him, not against him: no rival of Lily's, but Lily's best and most determined friend. Excellent Countess.

But what could she or anybody do for him to-night? To-morrow, Montagu said, must be done what it would have been better if he had done the moment of his arrival in town.

"What is that?" asked Delafosse.

"Put yourself in communication with the

professional runners and eaves-droppers of this wonderful world, and set afloat all possible private inquiries."

"But what will be the use of that, Montagu?" asked his wife. "She herself has already communicated with him twice, and can do so again. She can always write to The Hold."

"Yes, but how do we know but that now she is under some constraint? She may have gone to some people in town, friends or relations, who are playing her false, and who prevented her from writing at greater length than she writes in those notes."

"Or," added Delafosse, his own practical sense reawakened by his friend's, "she may have discovered that they are playing her false, and she may have sent those notes, with their knowledge, in order to throw them off a scent which she is even now preparing for me elsewhere."

"Quite so. And therefore all the more reason why you should try to find out what

she has done and where she is, though she may be in such a position as not to be able to tell you. The real point is, to get at her whereabouts."

"But don't you think," suggested Mrs. Narracott, "that you, rather than Sir Everard, had better see to all this, and do it under another name than your own? Mr. Swetenham may be employing the same mechanism; and his name figuring in the matter would only arouse suspicion."

"Well thought of."

"And you will stay here meanwhile?" she asked.

"That however pleasant," he answered, "would never do. If Lily, when once found, is to come here——"

"Which she certainly is."

"In that case I cannot keep away too much. My being seen in and out of your house would probably only cause it to be watched by Mr. Swetenham, who will doubtless still

believe that I have had a hand in his daughter's flight from home."

"Of course," said Montagu. "You remain quiet, however hard and tiresome it may be, in Northumberland-street, for two or three days, going to the bottom of St. James's-street every evening at eight for security's sake, though I do not now expect that anything will come of that. I meanwhile will make all necessary inquiries—trust me for that sort of business—and let you know immediately all that I get to know, myself. You have ordered all letters to be forwarded from The Hold, of course?"

"Yes, to Northumberland-street."

"Good. Lie quiet there, and see what happens."

For three days, the three most helplessly dreary days he had ever spent, he did lie quiet in that melancholy locality. Three more evenings he passed—one of them in a drenching rain—at the bottom of St. James's-

street; and all to no purpose. The only report that Narracott could give of the investigations which he had set afoot, was that somebody had forestalled him in them; and the description of the somebody answered, both in figure and probable behaviour, to Philip Pemberton. As far as Narracott's researches went, it did not appear that Mr. Swetenham was making use of the same means to hunt out his daughter.

It certainly began to dawn uncomfortably upon Delafosse that the girl upon whom he was expending so much love and anxiety, and concerning whom he was now taking so much trouble, had possibly all along been making him her dupe. That she had been making him such during the last few days, her notes, with their contrary results, made more than probable. Yet he could not be convinced so quickly. He did not wish to be convinced; he preferred to go on believing that some fresh persecution, some ill-wind blowing him at least no good, had sprung

up in a new quarter beyond the ken of his observation. Montagu inclined to the severer, Countess to the more loving and faithful opinion.

"No, no," she said; "you believe in Lily, Sir Everard. So far, I think, you have treated her very badly. Do not commit the crowning injustice of suspecting her of treachery."

So she spoke on the third evening, in the teeth of all appearances. At the same interview, it was agreed that he had now much better return to Batterton, where Lily knew well enough he was likeliest to be found, if really wanted and to be got at at all. Montagu promised not to relax his inquiries, and Countess to receive the mysteriously missing one with open arms, the moment she was discovered.

"Poor fellow!" she said, as her husband and she went up-stairs to rest, after going with him to the door, and there bidding him good-bye. "Poor fellow! he is terribly

worried and cut up. I did not think he cared about her so much. I am so glad to think that I did not do the mischief I might have done by telling those cousins of Mr. Pemberton's about Rosie Raffles."

"Don't be too sure that you have not done a great deal of mischief by saying what you did."

"You surely do not think so, Montagu?" she said, with a tone and look of dismay. "If I thought so, I should never forgive myself. Had I imagined that he really really loved her, I would sooner have bitten off my tongue than have breathed a syllable about it."

"You may depend upon it that they, in the supposed interest of their cousin, would take mighty good care to let Miss Swetenham know all about it."

"Would they, do you think?"

"Why, what do *you* think, as a woman?"

"I suppose they would. I am awfully

sorry. But then she offered to run away with him *after* they must have told her, if they told her at all."

"And perhaps for that very reason; in order to know if he really cared for her or for Rosie Raffles."

Poor Countess looked horror-stricken at this suggestion. At length, however, she gathered courage and said:

"No, no, Montagu, she had some more powerful reason than that, you may depend upon it."

"What reason?"

"I cannot tell. But I would lay my life upon it that there was one. Had she been doubtful only about Rosie Raffles, she would have spoken about it to him. Time will show, but I feel perfectly sure that in that, at least, I am right."

CHAPTER VII.

THREE WOMEN.

THE next day Delafosse returned, wearied and low spirited, to Batterton. There was but one letter by that morning's post, and it was from Ambrose Champion. It simply said that he had fully intended being back at The Hold by this time, but that his brother—he had never mentioned him or any other relation before—was seriously ill, that he had been obliged to go down to Shropshire to see him, and that such and such an address would find him there. When his brother was out of danger, he

would return to The Hold, if Delafosse wished it.

He tried to settle down to work. He re-read some of his recent manuscript leaves, and came to the conclusion that they were the dreariest nonsense ever penned. He rode and smoked and slept and—I am sorry to say—swore, or at least used, for him, unusually strong language; pronounced old Swetenham to be the most, &c., old curmudgeon that ever went on boots; and as for Lily, why—nay, God bless *her!* It would turn out all right yet. Every other day or so, he received letters, forwarded by Montagu, from the various private inquiry offices that had been pressed into the service, asking the most absurd questions, making the most monstrous suggestions, and raising the most splendid hopes, only to be destroyed forty-eight hours later.

During the first week after his return home, he felt no temptation to saunter in the direction of Hannah's cottage. His mind

was kept so completely on the stretch by anxiety, that it was not possible for it to be diverted by any other considerations. Besides, he felt so outraged and humiliated by a state of things which he could neither command nor explain, that he did not care, in such a frame of mind, to face one before whom he had always maintained an attitude which she herself had called and habitually worshipped as "calm strength." Gods, naturally enough, do not like being caught tripping by mortals, particularly by mortals who have been their especial adorers.

But when a week had passed, and Montagu could no longer give him any encouragement, and anxiety began to yield to inevitable resignation, loneliness and recollection of certain very pleasant sprightly ways, want of comfort and the recovered consciousness of the existence of a pair of bright flattering eyes and a pretty head with short wavy curls, all drove him to put on the best face he could, and to turn his steps

in the direction of the little woodland homestead.

Wonderful Rosie! there she sat, just as usual, covering miles of paper with her galloping quill pen. No sooner did she hear his step, and catch a glimpse of his presence, than up she jumped and hastened towards him.

"Have you forgiven me then, at last?" she said, looking up into his face with a semi-fond, semi-ludicrous penitence.

"Forgiven you, Miss Raffles!"

"*Rosie*, Sir Everard! or I shall be sure you have not forgiven me, and do not intend to do so."

"Rosie, then. But why am I to forgive you at all? What have you been doing, so very wicked?"

"*Are* you not angry with me, then? I felt sure that you must be, as you never came near. It is three weeks since I saw you."

"The first of those three weeks was your

affair;" he answered. "I came to see you, and you had gone."

"And I thought you were angry with me for that."

"Not in the least. You were quite right to go. And indeed I admired you for doing so."

"Do you know I was almost glad to think that you were angry with me for that?"

"Why."

"Because it would have proved that you cared whether I was here or not."

He laughed.

"I was not angry, as I tell you, because you had not only a perfect right to go, but a good reason for going. I hope you succeeded."

"Quite. I settled all their miserable little quarrels for them, and then came back."

"By that time, *I* had gone."

"Then you have been away a fortnight?"

"No, only a week."

"Then what of the other week?"

"This last one?"

"Yes; during which, though you assure me you were not angry, you have never been near."

"I have been too busy—mentally, at least; and if you want me to be frank, not in the humour to come here or to go anywhere."

"I thought you looked bothered, the moment you came in."

"I am, rather."

"Can I help you, Sir Everard."

"Thanks, Rosie. No, you cannot."

She got nearer to him somehow, though without manifestly moving.

"Will you not tell me what troubles you?"

"I cannot: at any rate, at present. It does not concern myself only, or probably I should tell you."

"Pardon me."

And straight she altered the tone of her

voice, threw merriment into it, and sunshine into her eyes, and gaiety and buoyancy into all her movements. She was striving to lead him away from his thoughts, and before long, I declare, she quite succeeded. He literally remained there three hours. When he looked at his watch, he was astounded.

"Why Rosie, it's half past three."

"I know that:" she said.

"I have made you lose half a day."

"How so?"

"I have prevented you from working, for three hours."

"I would rather sit and talk with you, Sir Everard, you know well enough, than write all the books in Christendom."

"You will not find it so profitable."

Perhaps she thought that there might be two opinions even about that. She did not, however, express her opinion, if she had one. She only said:

"I prefer pleasure to profit."

"Well, on this occasion, I may safely say, you have given quite as much as you can possibly have got."

"I am so delighted to hear you say so."

"I came in, as you noticed, worried and just a little down. You are a witch, Rosie; you have quite transformed me."

"How I wish I were a witch in good earnest!" she answered, her bright eyes waxing brighter, and her whole face aglow. "If I could only have a broom to ride on! My word! would I not career round and round the old chimney-stacks of Batterton!" He looked at her—he could not help it, for his life—admiringly.

"But seriously," she continued, changing her manner, and getting nearer to him by that knack she had, without ever seeming to stir—fawning on him, in fact—"seriously, Sir Everard; though you cannot tell me your troubles and annoyances, and I really

do not want to know them, *do* let me contribute towards mitigating them. I almost think I can. Don't think me conceited."

"No fear of that."

"That's all right. You have been so kind to me."

"I do not see how."

"Yes, you have, in many ways; and I have a right to want to try to repay you. When you are happy and merry, do not trouble to come here. I am all right and work hard. But when you are very very bothered, and there is no one else to cheer you up, come in here; at any time, no matter when; and I will promise to do my very best to pick you up again. Is not that the phrase?"

"Thanks so much, Rosie. You are very very kind, and I will come. As far as I can see, I shall come pretty often, then; for my bothers are not likely to be over soon."

"You know you cannot come too often,

though I sincerely hope that your bothers will be over very very soon. And if I can help you in any other way——remember, the poor little mouse was of considerable assistance to the big, strong, clumsy lion."

"I am not much of a lion at present, I think."

"Yes, you are, and always must be. But what can a lion do against nasty small snares, such, as I dare say, surround you?"

He looked hard at her. But it was perfectly evident to him that she meant nothing by what she had said, except to continue the simile of the fable with which she had commenced. He bade her good-bye, rode away, and said aloud to himself as he did so,

"What a little brick she is! Poor Rosie!"

"Of all the strange and perplexing things I ever heard of," Montagu Narracott was saying to his wife that same day, "this flight of Miss Swetenham is the strangest. All the

reports I have received just amount to nothing. The fact is, they have not come upon a single trace of her from first to last. Nobody has seen her since the end of her father's sermon in Rymington church."

"Do you think that——"

Here Countess stopped.

"Think what? That she is dead, drowned, or something?"

"Yes."

"I should have thought so if it had not been for those notes to Delafosse. They, fortunately, put such an idea quite out of the question."

"True, I forgot that."

"She is probably at home again by this time. And, depend upon it, she never can have gone far. She must have been in the neighbourhood all along. We shall probably hear as much in a few days. I am going to write to him to say that prosecuting any more inquiries by professional means is labour and money thrown away."

"What will he do, then?"

"What can he do but remain where he is?"

"Do you know if she is down there still?"

"Who? Rosie Raffles?"

"Yes."

"I believe so. She has not returned to town."

There was a pause.

"Let us go down to him."

"Where?"

"To The Hold."

"Never, whilst *she* is there!" said Countess, firmly.

"Why not?"

"Because I do not choose."

"It is not his fault that she is there. You surely do not doubt his account of the matter?"

"Not at all. I believe every word he says as thoroughly as the Gospel. But why does he let her remain there?"

"How can he help it?"

"Help it! As easily as possible. The cottage belongs to him."

"It belongs to a tenant of his."

"Which is the same thing. He could get her out of it, if he really wished it. But he does not wish it."

"Really, I don't see why he should wish it."

"Neither do I; I never said I did. But I do see why I should not go and visit him as long as she is there. Indeed, he has not asked us."

"It is not likely that he should ask us a third time, after we have refused twice. It is our place to offer to go."

"You may offer for yourself, Montagu, if you like; but I beg you will not do so for me, as I certainly should not go."

"Well, you may be sure he will not ask us again."

"I should not go if he did."

"Nonsense. Come," he said, putting his

arm round her; "let us go and see the poor fellow; he must be desperately down."

"I shall do nothing of the kind, Montagu. Indeed, I think you are as bad as he is. You want to be near her, too."

He burst out laughing.

"What a wonderful Countess it is!"

"Wonderful or not, I shall not change on that point. Mark my word! It will not surprise me at all if Sir Everard should end by marrying her."

"Rosie Raffles!"

"Yes, Rosie Raffles."

Montagu roared again, making the house shake with his irrepressible merriment.

"Marry Rosie Raffles! Marry the moon, child! Of all the ridiculous notions—— But if you really believe it"—and he laughed again—"if you really believe it, why not come down and try to save him?"

"It is not my place to save men from the effect of their own weak, foolish vanity. A likely thing, indeed! for me to go down

there and have her making love to him under my own eyes, which she would do in a moment."

"And you seriously think, if she did it, that he would be influenced by it?"

"Influenced by it! It is not a question of being influenced by it. About that there can be no doubt. I know you men rather too well for that. The question is, will he be able to resist the influence?"

"Trust him for that. Something else would be a deal more likely, if he were a different fellow from what he is."

"And what is that?"

"Why, not that he should burn his fingers, but that she should burn hers. She may thank her stars she has got such a man to deal with as Delafosse, or——"

"I don't know much about that. I suspect you excellent men are all pretty much the same. I would much rather that none of you were tempted."

"Then there is another reason for going; another danger to save him from."

"*Him* from! *Her* from, you mean. But it just happens that there is no danger for her at all. *She* is safe enough. Not for the reason that you give, but because Mistress Rosie Raffles is perfectly able to take care of herself under any circumstances. Laugh as you like, but the real danger is for Sir Everard. I wish him well out of it."

"Well, *I* am afraid for her—not much, because I know what a gentleman he is, but just a little."

"And *I* for him, not little, because I know what a cat she is, and therefore very much indeed."

"And you will not come and help save him?"

"Certainly not. It is their own affair; and they may settle it between them."

Matters had changed considerably, it seemed, since she told Griffon, R.A., in that

very room four months ago, that he might be quite sure Sir Everard Delafosse was not going to marry either Rosie Raffles or anybody else, without her permission. When she said to Sir Everard a short time after, "I know I shall hate that woman," she had little idea that "that woman" would dexterously take up a position which she could not even attack, much less upset. Did she remember Sir Everard's answer, "You will be very foolish if you do?" Words such as these are usually spoken and forgotten; but they are often marvellously faithful anticipations of a future we could not possibly see at the moment of uttering them.

Thus it was, however. She had shown herself quite ready to try to assist him to marry Lily Swetenham, but she steadfastly refused to try to assist her husband in preventing him from marrying Rosie Raffles. The first was only a sacrifice of feeling, but the second of dignity. She knew well enough that when Lily became mistress of

her friend's hearth and heart, there would not be much room for her. That, however, she could bear, and, indeed, generously abet. But if Rosie Raffles were to be permitted by him to manœuvre herself into such a position, she would not wait to be ousted; she would quit at once.

Immediately on leaving Hannah's cottage, and much about the same time that Narracott and his wife were holding the above-recorded conversation, Sir Everard turned his horse's head in the direction of Philip Pemberton's. The latter was at the lodge just as he arrived.

"Come in, Sir Everard: very glad to see you. Here, take Sir Everard's horse!"

He dismounted, and they walked together up the drive. They had not seen each other since that drenching Sunday night, nearly three weeks ago.

"Have you any news about Miss Swetenham?" asked Delafosse.

"Not a word. On the Monday after-

noon, the day after I saw you—I hope you are not offended with me on account of that Sunday night business?"

"Not in the least."

"I really could not help it. I came only for the purpose of taking care of poor Mr. Swetenham."

"I know that; and indeed he needed it. You went up to London the following afternoon, do you say?"

"Yes."

"*I* went up in the morning. Did Mr. Swetenham go with you?"

"Yes, as soon as he heard—for he found out—that you had gone there. But he left people to watch your place."

Delafosse could not help laughing.

"How very absurd! How credulous and incredulous the same people always are!"

"He still sticks to it that you know perfectly well where she is, says that he has proof positive of it, and is quite angry with me because I am unwilling to believe this."

"What is his proof positive?"

"He refuses to say. Indeed, now he will no longer allow the subject to be mentioned by anybody."

"But when he did still speak about it, what did he say?"

"Nothing really to the purpose. When we got to London, he refused to do anything towards finding *her;* he devoted himself entirely to watching you, whilst I prosecuted the other inquiries."

"I heard you were doing so—or at least that somebody was, and it was easy to guess that the somebody was you."

"And I heard just the same of you. But further than that, I was made aware, through Mr. Swetenham, of your putting up at Northumberland-street, and of all your other movements. He says that you somehow managed to give his people the slip——"

"His people the slip! Neither they nor he ever entered my head."

"And that he has the most complete

demonstration of your complicity in her flight. Indeed, I don't mind telling you that your movements are still watched."

"If he watches much longer, he ought soon to be satisfied that I am as much in the dark as he is. Surely, Pemberton, you are not fool enough to doubt it, to say nothing of my word?"

"Certainly not. I have no matter of doubt that it is to you, as to us, a most strange and painful mystery."

Delafosse, of course, said nothing about Lily's notes to him. Mention of them could do no good, and might possibly make more difficult any future attempts on her part at communication with him, supposing that she still harboured the intention.

As they approached the house, he could see Miss Langley and her sister walking away from it in the direction of the plantation, in the company of a gentleman. All three had their backs turned to him.

"My cousins do not see you. I will call them."

"No, don't. I will go in and see Mrs. Pemberton. Is that any one I know, who is walking with them?"

"I do not think you know him, unless you have met him at The Slopes. It is Mr. Swetenham's new curate, Mr. Tomlinson."

It was the bland young clergyman who had preached on the Sunday morning, *vice* the Vicar, who was nursing his theological wrath to keep it warm for the afternoon. He was one of a class, fair-haired, fair-faced, very clean-looking, strictly orthodox, entirely destitute of ideas, even of other people's, mellow-voiced, much given to laughing when required, good-nature itself, quite a gentleman, and as poor as a church-mouse, which he very much resembled. But Mr. Swetenham liberally allowed him one hundred and sixty pounds per annum; so he was always well-dressed, and alto-

gether looked well-to-do. Miss Kate and Deborah had taken him in hand immediately on his arrival, and it was morally certain that one of the two would marry him, since both had in their hearts an abstract preference for marriage, and nobody else had a concrete preference for marrying either of them. But Heaven and the Establishment had at last thrown Mr. Tomlinson in their way, and they were not the girls to be ungrateful for large mercies. Which of the two the bland curate eventually married, depended entirely upon themselves. It was quite certain that he would never propose to either, but equally certain that he would accept whichever of the two had the prior dexterity in reality to propose to him without seeming to do so. No very indelicate proceeding, surely, in young—or, if you like, not so very young—ladies, each with ten good thousand pounds apiece, whilst he had just nothing!

"I am welcome, I hope," said Sir Eve-

rard, standing on the threshold of the old-fashioned drawing-room, where Mrs. Pemberton was sitting.

"Most welcome, Sir Everard!" she answered, sweetly; and he advanced, took her hand, and bowed low. "You are welcome at any time, but especially so when you are in trouble."

Philip shut the door, and left them.

"Sit down, and let us talk this sad business over," she continued; "at least, if you have no objection."

"None at all; at any rate, with you, Mrs. Pemberton. To begin with, you have no doubt that I was perfectly ignorant of Miss Swetenham's flight till your son told me, the same evening."

"No doubt whatsoever. My son told me that you had given him your word, and that is quite enough for us both."

"Since her flight, I have done everything in my power to find her, but I have completely failed."

"Just as Philip has. Tell me, Sir Everard, do you love Lily very, very much?"

"As much, Mrs. Pemberton, as, I believe, it is possible for a sane man to love any girl. I confess that I almost begin to doubt if, under the circumstances, I can justify myself to myself for loving her so much; but as yet it is quite impossible to subdue my affection, or even to bring it within more reasonable bounds."

"But why should you do so?"

The question reminded him that he had made the remark most inadvertently. His real reason for not being quite satisfied with himself for still loving Lily so much, was because he could not convince himself that, in the matter of her notes, if not, indeed, in much more, he had not been her dupe. This, however, he could not mention to Mrs. Pemberton; so he answered, rather lamely:

"Because she has done what, on the whole, I cannot approve."

"It never occurred to you, then, to run away with her? Such things used to be done, Sir Everard, when I was a girl, but I never could bring myself to think it the right thing."

"I do not mind telling you in confidence that Miss Swetenham was quite willing to elope if I had wished it: poor child, she seemed so miserable: but I would not sanction it."

"If Mr. Swetenham only knew! But he is past talking to."

"Knew what, Mrs. Pemberton?"

"What you have just been telling me. He is—or was, for now he refuses to say anything about it——"

"So Philip tells me."

"He was most bitter and severe against you: said that you had marred the peace of his house, and acted in the most underhand manner."

"That is rather hard, is it not?"

"Very hard. And though I have no

reason to suppose that he will allow me, for some time, again to allude to the subject, in case he ever does, I should be glad, you know, to be in a position to answer his accusations for you."

"Thanks, very much."

"Not at all. And, indeed, at present, we see comparatively little of him. He is displeased with us because we do not take a more decided part against you and her too."

"It is so good of you not to do so."

"It is only fair, as far as I can see. But tell me, how did you come to propose to Lily? Would it not have been better to have gone to her papa and mamma first?"

"Suppose I grant that it would—and I scarcely think that such would be my opinion——"

"Well," said the placid old lady, "opinions do vary."

"But even so, I had no chance. I met Miss Swetenham out riding, by sheer accident. I need not, and I cannot, go into

particulars; but you must again take my word for it that I could not have allowed the opportunity, unsought by me, to pass over and not to tell her that I loved her, without the most serious danger of leading her to believe that I did not love her at all."

"I can understand that. And then you went to Mr. Swetenham?"

"Yes, within a week, and without seeing Lily again in the mean time. I could not go to him before, on account of what had happened—you know what I mean."

"Quite. Poor Philip! He is getting over it very nicely, though. His own disappointment, I mean. About the rest of it, he is, of course, as miserable as all of us."

"You do not know how kind I think it of you to receive me like this, and how I appreciate it."

"In this world, Sir Everard," she said, "we ought to wish only each other's happiness, giving the preference—as I think we

may—to those nearest to us. Of course I should have liked Lily to have accepted my boy. But when she did not, but accepted you, then everything was altered. I will not pretend to hide that there are reasons—and you will easily guess them, without my naming them — why I would rather not have heard that she was fond of you, Sir Everard."

"Quite so, Mrs. Pemberton; I understand perfectly."

"There are differences of opinion which I, as one of the old school, shall never cease to think of the most serious importance, whatever may be thought by some people to the contrary, and I would much, much rather see a girl united to a man who holds certain views than to a man who holds certain others. But when I once know positively that they love each other, and that there is nothing else to be said against either of them, then I give in to what seems to be a decree of Providence, who knows better

than we do, and I am all on their side and in favour of the marriages which are made in heaven. So I say to you, and so I said for you to Mr. Swetenham; only, he would not listen to me."

Sir Everard took the dear old lady's hand and kissed it reverently, showing her that some of the present generation have good hearts and good manners too. He was no wiser for his visit; but somehow he felt better, were it only for the twenty minutes' society of that placid Christian gentlewoman.

CHAPTER VIII.

PATIENCE REWARDED.

The more the days passed and neither he nor anybody of whom he could hear, received any news of Lily Swetenham, the more Delafosse felt himself forced to yield by degrees to the melancholy suspicion that she had deceived him.

Let there be no mistake about it. Previously to the quite unpremeditated, though clandestine and considerably prolonged, proximity of their palms, that quiet summer evening at The Slopes, he had not only abstained from all wild language about Lily

and her merits, but he had in reality not felt for her any unconquerable predilection. He admired and preferred her, and believed her to be justly lovable; he had a high esteem and a sentimental bias for her, and that was all. But he had ridden home that hot night from Rymington, with his sentimental bias transformed into something that would require to be expressed by a much stronger name. He was then three weeks without seeing her. But that strong something, whatever name you might wish to give it, was only strengthened by the undesired but inevitable delay. And when, at length, in the long lanes at the close of August, he had opened out all his heart to her, and she had seemed to bare all hers in turn to him, the strong something was full-grown, and had plenary right to the title of reasonable but withal passionate love. Sobered in a sense it was, but so sobered that it was deepened and more settled, by the immediate discovery already partly anticipated, that it could not

at once be gratified. The father's obstinacy but strengthened the lover's; and though Sir Everard had made himself by sheer strength of will, since Nature had certainly not made him, that mould of man who waits patiently for a desired end without being thrown out of working gear by the fretfulness of waiting, withal he would have gone on loving Lily all the while with an attachment tender enough to have satisfied the most exacting of the sex. Then came the astonishing announcement of her flight; and however sincere he might have been in his refusal to countenance her suggestion as to the best and readiest means of escaping from her parents' unreasonable tyranny, her carrying it out despite of him, satisfied him so thoroughly not only of her immense affection for him, but of the excessive character of the domestic discomfort which must have had a large share in driving her to the desperate step, that his love took fresh fire and waxed into as amorous a flame as ever

burned in breast or figured in fable. Let there then, as I say, be no mistake about it. This man loved, or *had* loved, Lily Swetenham, with all the force of an uncommonly forcible nature.

But now? Such a love when it has once fairly mounted a man and ridden him hard and has got well hold of the bridle, is not so easily shaken off by him, be he ever so strong-willed and accustomed to be sovereign over himself. Still, if Sir Everard Delafosse could have had complete proof that the suspicion of Lily's duplicity was well founded, and that therefore she was no longer worthy of his or anybody's love, he would have shaken it off somehow and before very long, you may be quite sure. But as it was, the suspicion, though it might and must remain a suspicion, could not be matured into anything approaching to certainty; and as long as that was the case, he felt that it would be unjust to condemn her. Until, however, he could

condemn her, he must continue to love her.

He thought thuswise. What in reality did he know of her? Before that significant but comparatively brief conversation under the weeping ash by the silently flowing river, absolutely nothing. Just that nothing which, in the present state of respectable society, young fellows usually do know of young girls whom they may have to marry. Men do not ordinarily fill their cellars with wine which they have never tasted, or, if they do, Heaven help their guests! and he who is fool enough to take any but a gift horse without a trial, or at any rate a warranty, richly deserves to be saddled with a thorough-going screw. But every day of the week, without a word of remonstrance or a murmur for time, folks pay ever so dearly for spouses whom they have never set eyes on save at dinner, or dance, or play, or fashion-show, where both themselves and their manners are as much doctored and

got up as was ever vicious cob or ill-tempered roadster at a Yorkshire horse-market. And though I, and I trust you as well, have a great love and respect for dear old Mrs. Pemberton, who thought, with a good many other people, that marriages are made in heaven, I think we can remove matrimonial arrangements out of the celestial department, without any particular profanity.

Let us look at this matter quietly just for one moment. When pious folks say that marriages are made in heaven, I suppose they mean that happy marriages are made in heaven, for I am sure they are much too orthodox to credit, or discredit, heaven with the unhappy ones. But in what sense, I should like to know, are happy marriages made in heaven? Are sound hunters made in heaven, and does heaven keep watch over our unadulterated port? Are we not approaching the confines of an absurdity, and does not the truth really lie somewhere hereabouts, that sensible marriages depend, very much like other

sensible results, upon the exercise of sense? And how am I to know if Thisbe will make me a good wife, a wife, that is, such as I want, if I am never to see her out of costume or off the stage at all, until all stage tricks are cast aside, and all costume of every sort is flung off, and I find that I have got her whether I like her or not, and must keep her though I find her to be the exact opposite of what, powder-blinded fashion-fooled idiot that I was, I imagined her to be? Without going all the length of the epigrammatic cynic who says that we cannot know too much about each other before marriage or too little after, I do not see why we should rush into the still worse extreme and take each other, as the royal city of Chester recently took a young gentleman for its representative—as his distinguished father wished him to be taken—upon trust. If the worst comes to the worst, a constituency never has to put up with the wrong man for more than seven years; but how

about our vinculum, our unhappy bondage? I know of but one cure for that; and to sensitive men *that* cure is even worse than the disease.

Up to that sultry afternoon then, sultry afternoon tempered by the presence of the cool stream and the courteous foliage, Sir Everard Delafosse had known just as much about Lily Swetenham as the ordinary swain above portrayed, and he was compelled to make the avowal to himself as he now sat, in heat almost as great, but without the comfort that then brought such sweet mitigation, trying to think the whole matter out.

And, on that occasion, how much wiser had he become? They had had a decently long talk, and what was it all about? He remembered every word of it; remembered as he certainly should never have remembered it had it not been for what had happened since. She had been very inquisitive about foreign lands, about Italy especially,

and had expressed the most ardent longing to go there. Man-like—but, after all, it was very pardonable—he had, in consequence of the loving after-occurrence of that same evening, straightway connected her desire to visit continental countries, hitherto unknown to her, with her desire to visit them *with him;* to be with him in fact, since she was well aware that most of his time was spent abroad. Of course he did not then impute to her the conscious desire, much less the unmaidenly audacity of giving him to understand as much. But he knew something about women, this travelled friend of ours, and whether he were right or wrong as far as Lily Swetenham was concerned in this particular instance, he was unquestionably right in his general conclusion that what girls seem to say and really do say unconsciously, is a much better guide to what they really mean and what they really are thinking, than anything they say intentionally.

Rid, however, of this personal connexion which he had then thus given to it, and which it must be rid of now in order that he might make a fair estimate of its significancy and value, what did the conversation verily amount to, and what insight did it give him into her character? Could he deny, or indeed could he shut his eyes to the fact, that the whole of her language had pointed to a disposition singularly restless, averse from restraint, and impatient of domestic restrictions? No doubt her mind was congenitally larger than most female minds, and her home and home surroundings were somewhat smaller than many others. That might be pleaded by way of excuse, and perhaps of partial if not entire justification of her frame of mind. But the frame of mind remained there, and that it was which he was now endeavouring to arrive at. Supposing him to be so far right, that conversation which he had enjoyed with her under the overarching tree, when

seen in the new light of this now comprehended state of mind, pointed rather to a desire to get away from home, and to revel in the wonders of foreign travel, than to any special and exclusive desire to get away and revel in them, *with him.* To marry Philip Pemberton would have been but to tighten the chain which linked her to Rymington, and so to knot it as, whilst strengthening, still more to shorten it. No wonder then that, with such aims and ambitions, she should refuse to hear of any matrimonial link with sober-sided, jog-trot, just-a-month-at-the-sea-side-in-the-autumn, home-keeping, simple Philip Pemberton. Especially when there was a fine, gad-about, Queen's messenger sort of a fellow like himself, who was always on the move or always ready to be, a Ulysses without the drawback of any Penelope waiting and spinning for him at home, but ready to mount her up behind him, and show her the men and

manners of as many cities as she could wish for. Could he honestly make anything more of what she had said than that?

And then her willingness, her marvellous spontaneous willingness to cut and run with him to all those wonderful places, what more did it show than that she was sick to death of The Slopes, the sweet, sunny, but monotonous Slopes, sick to death of Rymington bells, more than sick to death of the backwards and forwards dreary-go-round humdrum sort of a life, with the faults, such as he had explained them to her, of both Italian and English scenery, without the beauties of either—viz. a very uninteresting foreground, and no horizon at all? So utterly worn out with them, in fact, as to be ready, and avow herself to be ready, to venture upon the most desperate means to get away from them; and when he refused his countenance and assistance, to get away from them without him? "Good-bye for ever!"

had she not said to him at parting? And did not that show that her mind was already fully made up?

But the notes, the two unexplained notes? What explanation were they capable of, but that they had been written purposely to throw him off the scent, and so prevent him from discovering her? She little supposed that, if he discovered her, he would then accede to all her wishes; no doubt she imagined that he would restore her to her father, and that if ever then he married her, he would treat her as demonstrated, by her very flight from home, to be one standing in need of judicious restraint rather than of unrestricted gratification, either in the matter of travel or in any other.

Did he suppose, then, that she had contrived to give everybody the slip, had really gone abroad, and had gained complete liberty and was thereby satisfied? Standing alone, such a supposition was to the last degree improbable. But when he

remembered that she must be entirely without money, the supposition became simply absurd, and the whole affair tumbled to the ground.

Was then his process of reasoning, apparently so calmly contrived and so impartially conducted, at best but a mental toy and puzzle, and worth just nothing at all? Upon his word, it looked like it. She could not be dead. Yet, if she were living——He would give up thinking about it, for all the thinking in the world came to nothing.

But he must go on loving her, must he not? Well yes, God bless her! he supposed so. It was terribly inscrutable; but he must not give her up altogether till he knew more.

Rosie Raffles was practically now his only joy; indeed, if it had not been for her, he did not know what he should have done. He soon began to go every second or third day; then he went regularly every second, and before very long he went every day as

a matter of course. Where else was he to go to? He had written to Ambrose Champion, condoling with him on the illness of his brother, but saying nothing more except that Miss Swetenham had run away from home, nobody could find out whither, and that if he had imagined it would have come to that, he almost thought he should have consented to run away with her at first. Now, it was too late. He did not take any notice of Champion's offer to return to The Hold. He did not want him now. He would be but a Job's comforter compared to this balm in Gilead, that had turned up in the shape of the young authoress.

She was always the same, always the identical sprightly, smiling, flattering, care-chasing Rosie. She gave so much, and exacted nothing. She made him feel better, without any allusions to his feeling "bad," sympathised with him without giving him at all to understand that she knew he was suffering, and showed herself most tender to his hurt without the slightest symptom

of indelicate and irritating condolence. She was like a skilful sick-nurse who never speaks by any chance, and whose step you never hear; who shakes the bottle, aside, and puts the medicine ready for you to take when she is looking out of window, arranges the bed-clothes when you are fast asleep, and sees to everything without ever being seen. Such was Rosie. She had not managed to get the witch's broom she spoke of, but she was careering round the chimney-stacks of Batterton for all that, and no mistake.

"Are you fond of riding, Rosie?"

"Riding on horseback?"

"Yes."

"I like it better than anything in the world."

"Why did you not tell me before?"

"Why should I have told you?"

"I could have mounted you."

"But I should not have dreamed of taking such a liberty, Sir Everard."

"Such a liberty as what?"

"As asking you or hinting to you to mount me."

He was pleased with her deferential delicacy. Men always like to grant their magnificent favours, unasked. So he added at once:

"It would have been no liberty. Are we not friendly enough for that? You are so desperately ceremonious."

"And are you going to mount me now?" she asked, getting nearer in her usual imperceptible fashion and looking up, with her curls thrown back, up, up, into his face.

"Certainly, Rosie, if you would like it."

"Should I not? And am I going to ride with *you?*" she asked, bringing a sudden rush of superlative gladness into her eager, upturned eyes.

"With whom else should you ride? unless, of course," he added, with evident banter "you prefer to be a solitary horsewoman and ride alone."

"How delightful it will be! When are we to have the first ride?"

"That depends upon when you can get a habit. How are we to go about that?"

"O, I never go about without one," she answered with a ready frankness; "I have one and all that thereunto appertains, up-stairs."

Men are probably as "stupid" as women say they are; and it is certain that it never occurred to him to ask himself if she had not brought this habit with her in the very expectation of being mounted by him. If she had really done so, she had displayed no ordinary tact. How long had she been at the cottage? He had discovered her there in the middle of July, and it was now the beginning of October. She had been on the spot three months, and in constant communication with him for two months and a half, and she had never made the faintest allusion to horses or riding, or her own tastes in the matter. Perhaps she

knew that everything comes to her, as well as to him, who knows how to wait; and women are certainly better hands at the game of patience than we irritable fellows, who are always for throwing up the cards if they do not fall into order straight of themselves. I may be wrong; but it certainly looked, however little Sir Everard might notice it, as if Rosie had considerable faith in "staying," when a good stake was to be run for.

"Then I suppose you ride well?" he only said, the blind blunderer.

"O yes; can ride anything; should be ashamed of myself if I could not."

"We will ride to-morrow, then."

She clapped her hands for joy.

"How delicious it will be! I revel in a good gallop, and now and then a little timber, eh, Sir Everard—may I?"

"You may jump over the moon, Rosie, if you like."

"But it is only witches that do that, and I have not yet got that broom that I wanted."

"It is well that you are a bold rider, for I cannot say much for the chestnut's temper. Nor is he a lady's horse specially, though he will carry you willingly enough. That man who was stopping with me used to ride him, Ambrose Champion. You remember my speaking of him."

"Yes," she answered quietly; "I remember. What time shall we ride?"

"Half-past three. Will that do?"

"Admirably. That leaves me all the morning to work."

"How industrious you are! Have you not finished your book yet?"

"Not quite. That journey to London to settle those people's quarrels, took up some days, and then threw me off work for a few more. And then, you know, this book is to be better than the rest, not so poor and superficial."

"I do not think you have ever forgiven me for that speech."

"How mistaken you are! It was the thing that first made me——" she paused—"well, like you, or esteem you shall I say, so much. But I wish *you* would do something again."

"Why?"

"Because it would be sure to be something good; though that is not my only or my chief reason now. I care for you far more than I care for your or anybody's public; and I think that work—work with an object—would win you from all other anxieties, and banish your burdens, whatever they may be."

"But I can and do work, without any immediate eye to publication. I do not publish, simply because, as I think I told you before, I have not got anything ready to say which I think likely to be listened to just at present, or so important that it is my duty to

say it whether it would be listened to or not."

"Doubtless you are right, and my suggestion was a weak one. As I have said so often, I envy your calm strength."

Always an earsome compliment. She must have known pretty accurately what his answer would be. But dropping waters wear the stone; and though he might outwardly seem, just as usual, to remain unaffected by her words, can constant appreciation by a feminine heart fall altogether without result upon a masculine one? There are some men so conceited, that they positively never trouble themselves to ask or think what may be their neighbours' opinion of them. Still, even such men as these—and Sir Everard Delafosse was scarcely one of them—cannot for their lives help preferring, other things being equal, the people who speak flatteringly of them to the people who speak depreciatingly or who do not

speak at all. Circumstances, it is true, had materially assisted this very appreciating young lady; but when all these are allowed for, there will still be a considerable advance in her relationship towards the lord of Batterton, which can be justly set down to no other account than that of her own personal skill. Three months ago she crept quietly into Hannah's cottage—no small feat, that of itself—and now, Hannah's cottage is the most important bit of building on the whole estate, and to-morrow, with your leave, she will lay her pen aside, put her little foot into Sir Everard's hand, so assisted, spring lightly into her saddle, and ride side by side with him, dexterously discoursing, through the secluded woods.

If Countess could but have seen her!

CHAPTER IX.

A BOLD HORSEWOMAN.

If we except that rare occurrence, a really fine May, no English month is comparable in charm to a really fine October. From the first faintest peep of dawn to the last doubtful delay of dusk, there is not an outdoor moment which is not delicious. No fickle frolicking shower sends you running for your life to nearest shelter, no excessive ray forces you to seek either natural or artificial screen. So equable, so constant is its humour, that you are scarcely more conscious of its benefits than of the steady circulation of your

blood, or the gentle exudation from your pores. It is life without the drawback of knowing it, joy without the alloy of having to think about it. Not a wing moves, no leaves stir, for in bright settled October weather they flush but they do not fall. O the calm enjoyment of the clandestinely colour-heightened woods, of the great tall thick perpendicular bracken, of the slowly softening paths that take your footfall and keep it silently, of the unrippled reticent-looking pools, the beautiful mellow aspect and holy content of the restful earth and sky! There is nothing more to wish for, for there is nothing more to come. As the evening's rest to a day of toil, such is October to the labour-exhausted year. Nature has done her work well and loyally, has got home all her fruits, and has rightly earned her grateful repose.

Side by side, the soft sod scarcely giving back the measured tread of their horses' hoofs, and their voices alone, and these gentle and low as became the time, breaking

the stillness of the clear blue air, Sir Everard Delafosse and his companion rode and rode through the dreamy afternoon. Not once, not twice, nor thrice, but many times; every day, as the sun swung round beyond the south, might they have been seen, had there been human eye to see them, leisurely sauntering in the saddle, faithful as the Dioscuri. Ever and anon, yet rarely, the quiet woods were startled and compelled to ring again with a burst of merry female laughter; and then a big, berry-bulged blackbird would burst out of some hazel copse, piping and fluttering as he went, and shaking down the golden leaves before their time. But that was seldom. Their voices mostly were as measured as was their pace. There was timber to take at times, and Rosie took it gallantly; but galloping, such as she had spoken of, there was none. Galloping amid the well-steeped-in crimson and gold of these leafy aisles would have been like flinging somersaults in the transept of a cathedral.

"I can tell you now what has been troubling me of late," he said, about the sixth or seventh time that they were out together.

"Can you?" she replied. "And do you wish to do so?"

"If it will not bore you."

"Anything that concerns you is necessarily of deep interest to me."

"Thanks: I am sure of it. Do you remember your asking me, one day just as I was saying good-bye to you, 'what do you mean by that smile?'"

"Perfectly."

"And my answering that perhaps I would tell you the next time I called."

"Perfectly, also. But you never told me."

"You were not there to tell. The next time was the Friday when I called and you had gone up to London."

"And left a note instead."

"Yes."

"Would you have told me if I had been there?"

"No, I should not. I only said 'perhaps.'"

"Quite so. But is it what you are going to tell me now?"

"Precisely. A few days before you asked me what I meant by my smile, I had proposed to a girl whom I loved."

He watched Rosie's face closely as he spoke; but there was not the smallest trace on it of any expression but that of listening curiosity.

"Judging from that smile, and from what I can recal of your looks and manners about that time," she said, "I should conclude that she accepted you,"

"She did so."

"She would have been a strange girl if she had done otherwise."

"Why?"

"O, don't ask me. It was a stupid remark of mine, meaning nothing."

Whereby, however, she had given him to understand—or he must have been very dull indeed—that in her opinion it would have been a very strange thing for any girl on earth to refuse him. And though he was not fool enough not to know that there must necessarily have been dozens of girls who would do so if he had against all likelihood happened to want them, yet it was clear what her opinion, however erroneous, really was, and such not disagreeable insinuations have their effect on the least penetrable ears. He went on, however, without any further allusion to the interruption.

"She accepted me, as I say, and on the Thursday following—the day before that only one on which I did not find you at home—I laid the affair before her father."

"And he?"

"Threatened to kick me out of his house, and would have tried to do so, poor old fellow, if I had not gone out of it at once."

"What tyrants fathers are!"

"Sometimes."

"What did you do next?"

"I saw the daughter the following day."

"Where, and how?"

"Out riding."

"By appointment, I suppose?"

"Just so."

"Well?"

"I urged upon her the necessity of patience, assured her that I would remain faithful to my engagement, and gave her my opinion that her father would yield the point at last, and all would end satisfactorily."

"What did she say to that?"

"That she was quite sure her papa would never give in, and that waiting would do no possible good. She then, herself, offered to run away with me."

"*Did* she?" asked Rosie with amaze.

"Yes. Are you surprised?"

"It strikes one as odd at first," she an-

swered, resuming all her quietness of manner, "for I suppose she was an English girl, educated to the usual notions?"

"*Educated* to them, no doubt."

"But when one thinks of it, one is not surprised, and for my part I think she was quite right."

"Then I must have been quite wrong, for I refused to run away with her."

There was a slight pause. Rosie again spoke first.

"May I ask a very blunt question?"

"By all means."

"Did you love this girl very much?"

"Very, very much, at last."

"But at first?"

"When?"

"Before you said anything to her, or did anything that signified as much as words possibly can? You understand me: I speak of those trifles that are not trifles, but cannot be expressed."

"I understand you perfectly."

"Did you love her much before then?"

"No. It is not my nature—my second nature, at least—to do so."

"May I ask another blunt question?"

"Any question you like; I shall not be offended. Only I must reserve the right of not replying; and you, in turn, must not be offended if I do not."

"Of course. Is the girl rich?"

"She will have money, some day."

"Much?"

"Sixty thousand pounds, perhaps, people say."

"That is much, is it not?"

"Yes; very much to some people."

"To you?" she asked. "You see how bold I am."

"Not the least too much so. Yes, to me it would be a considerable sum. My father left Batterton so much involved that I am a comparatively poor man. Sixty thousand pounds, judiciously used, would go a long way towards clearing my estates. The

frankness of my reply shows that I do not at all blame the frankness of your questions."

"Of course I do not suppose for an instant, Sir Everard, that you would marry any girl for her money. But would you have married the one in question if she had not had any money, or had but very little?"

"I think that is scarcely a fair way to put it. I would alter your question thus: 'Should I, though in my circumstances I might never have thought of marrying her if she had had no money, have thought of marrying her without it supposing my circumstances had been quite different? And should I, once having expressed my desire to marry her whilst under the belief that she had this money, have still gladly and lovingly married her, though I discovered that she had none at all?' Are you satisfied with that alteration?"

"Yes; I think you put it fairly enough."

"Then I may honestly answer that I have every reason to believe that, had I

been in a better position, financially speaking, than I am, and she had not had a farthing, I should equally have conceived and tried to carry out the idea of wishing to marry her."

"The answer to the second part of your question is easily anticipated. Despite the disagreeable discovery, you would still have married her from chivalry and a sense of honour."

"Pardon me, Rosie; you are wrong. Once having loved her, I should have married her from love, and from no other motive."

"It is exceedingly difficult to analyse one's own motives; but I am quite sure that you have done so, for my benefit, as faithfully as possible. Do you not think me very inquisitive?"

"Not at all."

"My excuse must be that you interest me so."

"You are quite right in this: self-analysis is a delicate and difficult operation. How

much the knowledge that Lily Swetenham——"

"Is that her name?"

"Yes."

"How pretty!"

"It is, very. How far the knowledge that she would probably be rich entered into my original readiness to think of her as a possible wife, it is impossible exactly to estimate. It did enter into it unquestionably, for I certainly should not have deemed myself justified in thinking of her or anybody as a possible wife, who had nothing."

The chestnut gave a great start. Rosie laughed.

"A big gad-fly, that is all. I have switched it off with my whip. There it goes!" He did not see it, but he did not look very hard. He went on.

"For my part I cannot at all defer to the doctrine that love is to be taken out of the category of the other emotions, to be exempted from the government and control of

reason, and to be erected into a sort of sovereign by divine right. Such a notion is to degrade our reason and our free will at the same time, and thus reduce us to a very low level in the scale of sentient beings."

"Then reason and free will would prevent you from marrying a girl whom you loved?"

"In extreme cases, certainly. But I spoke rather of their preventing me from loving at all, not from marrying whom I loved."

"I see. But you said that you would marry from love, and for no other motive, the girl whom you once had loved, though reason and free will had permitted you to love her under an erroneous supposition."

"Remember, I spoke of an erroneous supposition as regards money—nothing else. In such a case reason would surely commend my conduct and endorse the promptings of good feeling. Could anything be more unreasonable, as well as brutal, than to abstain

from marrying a girl whom, with the information then at your command, you were justified in loving, and whose love you had wholly gained?"

"You are quite right. I merely wanted to follow out your argument."

"Which you see?"

"Quite. But this girl? You had, then, of course, wholly gained her love?"

"I thought so."

"Do you think so no longer?"

"I will tell you how matters stand exactly, and shall so be telling you what I have hitherto told nobody but Montagu Narracott and his wife; and I told them because I thought they could help me."

"Do you tell me for the same reason?"

"No; I am perfectly sure that you cannot help me, and I do not think that anybody can, now."

"I am very sorry for that, though I am proud to have your gratuitous confidence."

"Then you shall have it. Two days after she had offered to elope with me, and I had counselled her to be patient, she left home. Her father concluded that she had come to me—I believe he thinks so still—and hurried off to The Hold, and broke into the room where I sat smoking. At last I got rid of him. She certainly had not only not come to me, but she had not even made me acquainted with her intention, except by an enigmatic 'Good-bye for ever,' which she had uttered on our parting two days previously. The following morning I started for town, where I thought, even if I did not find her, I should best be able to put in play the ordinary mechanism for doing so. But my hand was stayed."

"How?"

"By a note which I received from her."

Rosie's interest seemed to redouble.

"A note from her!"

"Yes; and that evening, in London, at the place where, in obedience to its in-

structions, I had gone to meet her, I received another, making a fresh appointment, but giving no explanation."

"Who gave it you?"

"A commissionnaire, who said that he had received it from a lad in the street. More he could not tell me."

"Do go on; it is so interesting."

"There is nothing more to tell. She never met me, and I have never heard a word from or of her since."

"How do you account for it?"

"I cannot account for it at all. It is a complete and, to me, most painful mystery."

"To return, then, to the question. Do you still think that you had wholly gained her love?"

"What do *you* think?"

"I would much rather not give an opinion."

"You think, then, that I had not."

"Her conduct is very strange, at any rate."

"The only question is, did she write those notes, intending to deceive and mislead me?"

"Do you think that the only question?" she said rather hastily, turning more towards him and opening wide her eyes.

"The principal question, however."

"I do not see that at all," she rejoined in a more positive and argumentative tone than he had ever heard her use before on any subject. "Supposing that, to begin with, she did not love you as much as you had imagined, in that would reside the chief deceit; and the affair of the notes would surely not be even the slightest aggravation of an offence against you, already so great as not to be capable of being made greater."

"Very true, supposing such to be the case."

"If such were not the case, why did she not wait as you wished and counselled her? Love in a woman, is faith; is submission, is affectionate obedience."

"But if her home were unendurable," he pleaded.

"Why did she not come to yours, or acquaint you with her resolve so as to give you the chance of co-operating with her scheme, if she had made up her mind not to co-operate with your more reasonable one?"

"True, too true. But remember, Rosie, you said a short time ago that you thought she was quite right in proclaiming her readiness to run away with me."

"So I did; but I say she was wrong in not submitting, when you, in the exercise of your better, or at any rate more authoritative judgment, refused."

The brave little woman was quite flushed with the process of her alternately offensive and defensive argument.

"Upon my word, Rosie, I had no idea you could reason so cleverly. You are quite a dialectician."

She laughed a merry laugh, and shook

her curls, which showed from under her riding-hat to singular advantage.

"So you do not think she really cared for me?"

"I would rather, as I said, not give an opinion at all. Indeed I have not one to give. Who could see one's way out of the maze, such as you have put it before me?"

"Who, indeed? I have given up puzzling myself."

"And I should give up bothering myself, if I were you. I suppose she could find you if she wanted you."

"Unless she is under constraint."

"Which you have no reason to imagine. Tell me: if you could satisfy yourself that she had never truly loved you, what would become of your love?"

"It would go straight out of me at once."

"See! what a lovely little animal!"

"A squirrel. There are hundreds of them in this wood. There it goes again."

He looked at his watch. "It is only a quarter-past five. You have never seen The Hold: would you like to have a look at it to-day?"

"Immensely. It would be the greatest of treats."

"Let us go then. To the right, see. We shall be there before sundown, and I shall have time to ride back with you before dusk."

CHAPTER X.

A NARROW ESCAPE.

They pushed on, breaking into the first canter they had indulged in that afternoon. Gradually the woods opened wide out, then partly closed in again, and there, flashing crimson in the rays of the just sinking sun, were the large square window-panes of The Hold. The dark but bright red brick of the stout old mansion boldly fronted them and asserted its long-established right to be the sovereign of the scene. Behind it and on either hand, like so many courtiers gorgeously arrayed, stood groups of richly de-

corated trees, bearing the beautiful brave autumn tints which marked their long and honourable service. In front, dotted negligently about, as though deferring less to ceremony, and careless as with the confidence of loveliness and youth, were slimmer and more scattered shrubs, evergreens that took no touch from October, pages and maidens, if you like, of a scene that the golden atmosphere made show as wholly courtly.

"Oh! how lovely!"

They reined in their steeds and were silent. Briefly she had expressed her first admiration, as such should ever be expressed, and only looked the rest; and praise was not here his province. At length he said:

"It wants a great deal done to it, though. Perhaps I could not make it lovelier, but I could make it more highly finished."

"Without spoiling its negligent grandeur?"

"I think so. That, you see at a distance; but its faults you can perceive only when you get nearer. A common peculiarity, they say, of great things."

"That may be, however, because our eyes are adjusted only to see at a distance. When we get nearer, we see improperly, and the fault of our vision we naturally enough call the faults of the object."

"A doctrine, Rosie, that I firmly believe to be true, and in the abstract very consoling. But it does not afford one much comfort in the close contacts of life. Let us hope, some of us, that we have a large aspect if we could only be looked at from the right distance, but we may depend upon it that our neighbours find us very small."

"Not all neighbours," she answered. "I find you bigger the nearer I get to you. Not that I mean to insinuate that I am particularly near."

"Perhaps you are precisely the right distance for judging," he rejoined—he could

not help it—with that bright glow of humour which always spread over his face when he began bantering.

She, however, answered seriously enough:

"Perhaps I am, though I do not choose to wrong you by thinking so. Most people look small when you are near them; and when you get any distance from them, they fade away altogether."

"You recal to me a short rhymed answer that I once gave to a pious but very thoughtful lady in Rome who was expressing her fears that the mental processes of the present age had a tendency to put God out of sight and get rid of Him entirely, and so lead to irreverence."

"What were the lines? Please repeat them."

> "Banish such fears, nor tremble lest
> A yet young Science teach to scoff:
> God is so great that each new test,
> But makes him still more manifest,
> Even by placing farther off."

"Admirable. I never read them."

"You were not likely."

"Are they not published?"

"Certainly not, Rosie. You cannot get rid of your professional habit of associating thought with print, though there is no necessary connexion between them. May we not have our private thoughts as well as our private affairs?"

"No doubt; but ought they not to be the smaller ones? Do not the big ones belong of right to the world, just as great men do? Have you really no wish to be up and doing something—something active, stirring, important? You see you have not yet convinced me that you ought not to strike out into the big public sea."

"But there may be a mighty deal of action and no end of stirring, without any accompanying importance. There is more action in a circus fight than in a real one, but there are fewer people killed, and there is less work done, and nothing whatever decided. In the world of action just at

present, I see nothing going on but sham fights, where the actors are more or less paid for any accidental blows or falls they may get. Now I am neither a mercenary nor an acrobat. If it ever does come again to real fighting, I should not wonder if I found it quite impossible to keep out of the fray."

"O, how I should like to see you hitting!" she said almost fiercely.

"And hit, Rosie?"

"Yes, for then——" she stopped suddenly.

"Then, what?"

"Nothing."

"You were going to say something. Tell me."

"Well, because then some of us would have a chance of nursing you?"

"Or burying me," he added, laughing. . . "You must come in. Wait, I will help you dismount."

She walked round by the gravel-path,

among the sward and the flower-beds where colour still lingered, but whence fragrance had gone, and entered by the door, on whose steps we saw him sitting when first we gazed upon The Hold.

"There is nothing to show you," he said, "but a row of good-looking good-for-nothing baronets, my worthy male ancestors, and another row of now not remarkable, now strikingly pretty women, my dear female ditto, against only one of whom, I am happy to believe, can anything be said, and that not very terrible. There is the best of the lot, but of whom, unfortunately, I know as little as of the rest."

"Your mother?"

"My mother. Listen: that is the first dinner-bell. You had much better stay and dine with me. If you do not, I shall lose my dinner too, or eat it quite spoiled."

"Why?"

"Because I must take you back before it, and there is not time to go to the cottage and back and wash in half an hour."

"But I can go back alone, and walk if necessary. Or the groom can come with me and bring back the horses."

"No, Miss Raffles, I am not so rude a cavalier as all that. If you will not dine with me, I will sacrifice my palate to my good manners."

"I will dine with you then. I would not repay you for so delicious a ride by spoiling your dinner."

"A speech at once grateful and sensible," he answered with a low playful bow. "Permit me to leave you for the moment, and to hand you over to the charge of the Phyllis who is approaching."

Her toilet was, of necessity, soon over, for she had nothing to change. But she seemed to linger with feminine affection in the huge though unpretending bedroom and over the large dressing-table with its big

bright mirror, all in contrast to the little poking room and bit of a looking-glass in the cottage, things which many men of wealth and taste generally prefer, but to which no true woman ever gets thoroughly reconciled. They like the outward signs of power even in a soap-dish or a towel-horse. White dimity has no charm for them, and even chintz is at best but a compromise. Give *them* silk rep and lace. Kidderminster forsooth! or even Brussels! Pile up Turkey till you do not know whether you are walking or floating; that's *their* style; and pray how can a woman make her hair fit to be seen with a brush that has not got an ivory handle?

Having, however, made all of the opportunity that her present condition permitted, she emerged into the gallery along which she had already passed with Sir Everard, and there she lingered, holding up the skirt of her riding-habit, and slowly examining the long line of family portraits. She did not pay much attention to the men; her own

sex it was, more powerful on canvas than out of it, that had for her the main fascination. It was just as impossible to guess what she was thinking about as it would have been absurd to ask what they were thinking about; but it is quite certain that if they could have thought at all and scrutinised her as closely as she was scrutinising them, their expression would not long have been doubtful. Some of those huge handsome fellows, helmeted, or belted, or ruffled, or gowned, had been a sad bad lot; mighty drinkers, cruel shots, superlative swordsmen, hateful to men, hatefully lovable to women, fierce and fickle, hot as the sun and shifting as the snow, bearers of beautiful live spoil, tricky as Mercury, insatiable as Jupiter, and inflexible as Pluto. They had all the vices of all the gods, but they had all married blue blood. They were very tolerant on one side the sheets, but they were bigotry itself on the other. They would have gobbled up this venturesome young woman

with the gulp and chuckle of an ogre, have walked round her and allured her and piped to her with all the supple deftness of a dainty insinuating satyr, or swum about her and pelted her with pearls and drawn her down, down, deliciously, dreamily down into glittering gluttonous caves, with all the frolicking undulating tricks of an amorous ocean merman. But as for rings and marriage peals, she might as well have hoped to jerk Juno out of her proximity to Jove!

"Come along, Rosie!" he said, bursting out of his dressing-room. "There goes the second bell, and I am as hungry as a hunter. You have been examining my ancestors again? Are they not a wicked-looking set of scoundrels?"

"They are very handsome."

"If 'handsome is as handsome does,' as I can remember my old nurse used to tell me—and it was about the only really sound piece of morality she had got hold of, though she was moralising from morning to night, and

from night to morning for anything I know —they were as unhandsome a crew as ever escaped *fossa cum furca*—the dyke and the gallows—a privilege which some of them exercised pretty unsparingly upon other folks. But they are all damned to a certainty, every man Jack of them."

She had never seen him in this mood and heard him in this strain before, simply because she had never dined with him. It was his invariable habit to frolic, in conversation, all through dinner. He was serious enough, to the extent of meaning what he said; but he always said it, at that meal, humorously and with an accompaniment of sportiveness. It seemed to be what boys would have called his playtime, and during it he knew no bounds.

"Damned, every one of them," he went on. "So that you see, Rosie, I shall have none but female relations in heaven; *they* are all saved, I would stake my own salvation on it. Not a bad arrangement after

all; for as I shall thus be the only male representative of the family, I shall be made a mighty deal of and thoroughly spoiled. Proper compensation for the complete neglect I have met with in this world."

"But were they really so bad, your progenitors?"

"Bad, Rosie! They were princes of darkness. There's a book—and a very interesting one—more *ben trovato* than *vero*, perhaps — called 'Lives of the Saints.' *Their* biographies would make a very handsome volume, and as true as gospel, and would certainly have to be called 'Lives of the Sinners.' Why not write it? I will give you all the particulars. Nay, I fear I could not tell you all, and you certainly could not put your name to the book if I did, and you were a faithful chronicler."

"What would Mr. Narracott say? *That* would be outraging public opinion with a vengeance."

"Yes, and shutting the doors of the

kingdom of——I mean the doors of the circulating libraries against you for ever. I wonder if I shall have to stand and listen to the catalogue of their misdeeds read out at the Day of Judgment? Everybody will think that I am just as bad as the rest of them, till my turn comes and I am shown to be the only flower of this very weedy flock. Do you think the recording angel, in consideration of my virtues, will drop a tear—it will have to be a very big one—and blot out the whole business?"

"He ought to do."

"On the whole, though, I think he had better not. They would all be forgiven in that case, and I should strongly object to that. You see I should lose all the advantages I just spoke of, in being the only male Delafosse in the company. On consideration, I think they had better be damned, and I will undergo the temporary humiliation of being considered as bad as they. I shall come out all the brighter for contrast."

Quite contrary to what was usual when they were together, she had but little part in the conversation. Truth to tell, he amused her quite as much as he astonished her. It was a new revelation to her, a presentment of his joyous side, which she delighted to find so exuberant.

"People usually brag of their ancestors," she said.

"But what have I to brag of, if I tell the honest truth? In mathematics, the extremes are equal to the means; and it is about the same in my family. Judge what the intervening members were like, when the first robbed the nation of as much money as got him this place, and the last—my poor, dear father — robbed me by spending as much as no longer makes it worth anything."

She would not hear of the horses being brought round again. Why should they not walk? If she would like it, he said, they would. She should much prefer it.

Her riding-habit did not inconvenience her in the least. What was a mile?

There was a fair array of stars, but withal the night was rather dark. Their way was through broad grassy paths, with silent woods on either side. They did not enter by the door of the cottage, but walked round, so as to approach it by the glass door, which opened out of her sitting-room into the garden. Just as they turned the corner of the house, where Sir Everard, still in gleesome mood, was laughingly and, for him, loudly teasing her about her monastic abode, a man dashed out of the house through the open glass door on to the grass-plat, ran at full speed across it, and plunged into the wood. Delafosse at once made a dash after him, and despite her attempt to stop him, by plucking hold of his sleeve, was immediately in chase. She instantly lost sight of both, and could do no more than await, at the extremity of the little garden where it bordered on the

thicket into which both had disappeared, the result of the flight and the pursuit.

"Don't, Sir Everard, don't!" she exclaimed, when he broke loose from her puny effort to detain him; "don't, I beg of you, don't!"

But the moment that he was out of sight, she stood either with a calmness or a self-command of attitude that, could he have seen it, would have, perhaps, astonished him.

Seven or eight minutes passed away, and then she heard slowly-returning footsteps through the brushwood. It was Sir Everard.

"How could you be so foolish?" she said, her bosom suddenly heaving, and her voice quite at issue with the stillness of her recent demeanour when alone: "I have been in an agony."

"What about, Rosie?" he said, laughingly.

"About you."

"About me? We were one to one."

"But perhaps he was armed."

"Armed with very quick heels, and defended by darkness and that confoundedly thick wood. The fellow might be within five yards now, without our being able to find him such a night as this."

"What would be the use?"

"You will, perhaps, know better when we go inside. No doubt he has walked off with all your valuables."

"I have none—here, at least. But let us go and see."

They entered. Not a thing seemed disturbed. Hannah had gone to bed. Rosie summoned her maid. The girl had not heard a sound, she said. A man might have been in the sitting-room; she supposed he must have been, since they saw him rush out of it. But it was quite certain that he had not been in any other part of the house, or she should have been sure to hear, and, indeed, to see him. There was but a small

passage from the room to the kitchen, where she had been the whole evening with Hannah, who had not gone to bed above a quarter of an hour ago. The man could not possibly have been up-stairs. She would go and see, but she felt positive he had not been bold enough to attempt that. But what an audacious thing even as it was!

"I suppose you can trust her?" Delafosse asked.

"Thoroughly. She is devoted to me."

"Do you think the simple explanation is that he has been spending the evening with her?"

"No, I am sure that is not it; because, in the first place, she would not attempt to hide so harmless a fact from my knowledge; and in the second, she could have done so had she wished. He had only to open the room door, supposing they were in here together, slip into the kitchen, and so out the other way."

"True. It's very odd. I could neither see nor hear him after he got into the wood. Looking farther for him was quite useless."

"And unnecessary. The ruffian is far enough by this time."

"And you are not afraid for to-night?"

"Not in the least. A fellow who runs off in that fashion is not very dangerous, do you think?"

"I should think not. Indeed, I do not speak of danger, only of your fear of it, which would be natural under the circumstances. Well, Grace?"

"He has not been up-stairs, sir. Nothing is missing, at least. And, as I said, I am sure I should have heard him."

"And I may leave you without scruple?" he asked.

"Certainly, as far as my fears are concerned. My only terror was, just at the moment, for you, when you ran after him."

"I flatter myself I could have given a good account of myself if I had been lucky enough to catch the prowling scoundrel."

"I have no doubt of that, if you had met on equal terms. I am glad, for peace sake, you did not meet at all. But what could he have wanted here? He has not touched a thing."

"Perhaps we arrived immediately after he did, and so disturbed him in time."

"Probably that is the explanation," she said, looking round. "He would have found it difficult to carry anything away worth the trouble."

"Unless he had stolen your manuscript."

"How I should have hated him if he had done that! I should have been as savage as a tigress robbed of her cubs."

"Good night, then, Rosie!"

"To-morrow, as usual, at half-past three. Are you sure you would like it?"

"Sure," he answered.

"Good night! I shall dream of all those portraits."

"I do not envy you your slumber, if your dreams be at all true. You would be

better in the hands of that fellow who cut for it as we approached than in most of theirs."

"Should I?" she asked. "Thank Heaven! then, I am only in yours. Good-bye! This has been the happiest day of my life!"

He strode rapidly away. Without changing her habit, she sat down, and was soon plunged in thought. It was but half-past nine. She had lighted the candles, and again threw the glass door wide open. In about twenty minutes there was again a sound of breaking brushwood. She heard it, but did not move. A man walked across the grass. She saw him coming, but still did not stir. A moment more, and he stepped into the room. It was Ambrose Champion.

"Thanks to that idiot of a maid of yours, I had the narrowest escape in the world—or, rather, *you* had; for it is now more your affair than mine."

"How was it her fault? What a rash

thing of you to seat yourself calmly here as though there were no danger."

"She said there was none; that you were on horseback, and that she should be sure to hear you ride up."

"So she would have heard, if we had ridden to the cottage, but we walked."

"Where from?"

"From The Hold; I had been dining there."

He stared at her.

"You're very wonderful, after all."

"You begin to discover it, do you? It is about time."

"I have known it long, Rosie," he said, with greater kindness in his tone. "But did you not get my letter?"

"Yes, yesterday."

"And I said I should be here by half-past seven."

"I know that; but I was not going to refuse an invitation to The Hold on that account."

Their positions seemed quite altered since we first saw them together. Then he was almost insolent, and she singularly meek. Now there was a touch of intentional defiance in her tone, and he seemed careful not to offend.

"You were quite right, and I am glad you went. Have you been there often?"

"To-day was the first time"

She had not moved from her seat. Her riding-hat was on the table at her side, and she leaned her head, that looked a little wearied, on her elbow. He approached, put his arm round her, and stooped as though to kiss her. She raised her arm slowly, but sufficiently to prevent him, pushed her chair back, and rose. He made no remark at the rebuff, but turned and began walking up and down the little room. She stood on the hearth, riding-whip in hand.

"You have often asked me of late to let you help me?" he said.

"With money, you mean?" she asked, curtly.

"Yes, Rosie, with money."

"And you have always refused."

"I will accept it now."

"What do you want it for?"

"For what you have always offered it so kindly."

And again he approached and strove to kiss her. Again she repulsed him.

"Not yet, Ambrose! We will talk of that later. As for the money for your advancement, you know quite well there is no difficulty about that. How much do you want?"

"The expense ought not to be more than a hundred and fifty pounds. But are you going to give it—or advance it—so ungraciously?"

"How ungraciously?"

"You used to ask me to kiss you once upon a time——"

"Yes," she answered; "and almost in vain."

"And now——"

She advanced to him, but bent her head low, offering only her forehead to his lips; but as he stooped to salute her brow she suddenly withdrew it.

"No! I prefer first to hear what you have got to tell me."

"Really, I have nothing to tell you."

"Such as it is, I should like to hear it."

She spoke with the tone of a master. But her look was far graver and sadder than when she had spoken with the tone of a slave.

CHAPTER XI.

A LITTLE MORE LIGHT.

People who are recovering from a disease are not unoften the slowest to perceive the first steps of their own amelioration. Enough of the dark shadow which had fallen upon Sir Everard still lingered over him for him scarcely to notice that he was gradually coming into light. But there could be no doubt that Time and his daily companion were, between them, working wonders. But as the sunshine fell upon him, she seemed to be sinking into shadow. He did not notice it at first; he was too much

like other men in that particular not to be preoccupied with his own mental state rather than with hers. But at length he remarked it—not aloud, but to himself only. All the conclusion, however, at which he arrived was, that now that she had done so much in contributing by her cheerful spirits to his own, she could fairly ask for them some little relaxation. She was rather quieter than before—that was all.

The month continued to be all that is lovely, and they still continued their daily rides. There was no change in the air, and scarcely any in the rich foliage, to suggest a change in their habits. She seemed content, and he was as much so as was possible under the circumstances. If it be wondered why he had no special friends in the neighbourhood where his family had so long lived before him, the answer is simple. What his own father had done towards cultivating its society we know already; and, further, that, until very recently, he himself had scarcely

ever been seen or heard of on the spot, and had been so much abroad, that, even when he was no longer so, he was supposed to be by most people. Nor, since his sojourn at The Hold, had he done anything to counteract the effect of his father's extraordinary career and of his own protracted absence. Rightly or wrongly, he rated what is called society very meanly. Some people will tell you that the men who complain of society being so meaningless and unprofitable, ought to go into it if only for the purpose of making it better and more valuable. But, to say nothing of the extreme doubtfulness as to whether the force of a few could do anything towards overcoming the inert power of so many, it may also be questioned if the duty of generosity exacts so large an amount of self-sacrifice as is certainly demanded from a thoughtful man when he is plunged amid the thoughtless. Nor must it be forgotten that they, the majority, will necessarily accept him on their terms, not upon his; and

these terms are that he should become just as thoughtless as themselves. They do not want instructing by him—not they indeed. They want more dinners, more dances, more flirting, fooling, and general pastimes. I really think society has no cause of complaint against men who content themselves with the merely silent protest of holding aloof from it.

Sir Everard Delafosse held aloof from it simply because he wanted nothing from it and had nothing to give it which it cared to accept. He did not abuse society at all, and it very rarely abused him. He entirely passed it by, and it repaid him with almost complete oblivion.

Studious or thoughtful mornings, therefore, broken occasionally of course by the one unquiet ghost which he could not lay, followed by woodland rides with one who often surprised, never irritated, and therefore always contented him, made up his present existence. As thoroughly puzzled as ever about Lily's

fate, and more and more inclined to believe that she had been the sport of her own hatred of home and invincible restlessness, had never loved him or loved him but little, and in the end, if not in the beginning, had completely deceived him, he grew resigned to a mystery which could never be thought of without pain, and which had to be thought of very often, but which nevertheless was now absent from his thoughts sometimes. He began to think that, when the leaves fell, he should again go abroad. Rosie had been of considerable use to him, and they were great friends, and whenever he could be of any service to her he should be only too delighted to prove his friendship. But even he commenced to perceive, now that he was recovering from his terrible trouble, and beginning to feel more as men ordinarily feel, that the present state of things could not last for ever, or, indeed, much longer. His going abroad would be the best and most natural means of conclud-

ing a relationship which, now that he despaired of hearing of Lily, was too close to be continued, unless it became much closer: an idea which had certainly never entered his head.

All this is natural enough. Every man of experience must be conscious that at one period he could not, without imperilling his peace of mind or his rectitude of conduct, have been constantly thrown into the society of a woman whom, at another period, he might have seen every day without a throb of passion or a pang of remorse. It depends entirely upon the conditions. Joseph was probably desperately in love with some excellent Egyptian maiden when Potiphar's wife got nothing from him but his garment. Had he been tempted at another time, he might not have left behind him so stainless a reputation. Is not this sound morality? If not, I should like to know why you beg on bended knee, every day of your lives, not to be led into temptation.

As long as Sir Everard's heart and head were preoccupied with the memory of what few but, to him, important passages of love had occurred between him and lost Lily Swetenham, Rosie Raffles, though certainly not meriting to be classed with the scriptural personage above mentioned, was just as little dangerous. He had never for a moment, as far as he was personally concerned, thought of her as wife or anything else. His sentimental life was too choke full of somebody else for her to contrive, even if she wanted, to get in and occupy as much as a corner of it. There had not been one to spare. But though Lily still haunted his heart in a melancholy sort of way, wandered through it, disturbed it, and could, if again becoming corporeal, have turned everybody and everything out of it again, yet she could not now be said exclusively to tenant it. Work, for one thing, had found its way back again. Merry peals of laughter and love of humour had found their way back

again. Rosie Raffles had entered it, and dusted it, so to speak, and set it partly in order again. Would she be content with that handmaiden's office?

Sexual love, till gratified, is the most egotistical and selfish of all the passions; and it is the most unreasonable thing in the world to expect a man or woman, for the moment its slave, to take the smallest interest in any other question, or to be alive to anybody else's wants or condition. Delafosse was less likely to be its slave for a lengthened period than any but the very best stamp of man, and, like the best stamp of man, would never have been its slave at all but for extremely unusual circumstances. Mr. Swetenham's perplexing behaviour, followed by Lily's flight, and the weary, profitless attempts to solve the mystery connected with it, had upset him to a degree which a course of smooth love, or even a love attended with more than average difficulties, would have been powerless to do. And I

think that it is to his credit that he was able, within so short a time, to pull round again, and to begin to consider other people's feelings as well as his own. And it is no exaggeration to say that it was this consideration, and no self-seeking or straining after comfort for himself, that thus early induced him to conclude he had much better leave The Hold and be off elsewhere. He did not yet allude to his intention, but went on from day to day hoping that Rosie would announce her own schemes of departure. He would much rather that their separation, soon inevitable, should be her work and not his.

The only way in which he had as yet approached the subject was by repeated inquiries, such as we have heard, when she expected to finish her book. He trusted that its conclusion would be the sequel and cause of her farewell to the cottage. But whenever he asked the question he was met with the same reply—to the effect that she

was taking immense pains with it ; that she worked much more slowly and laboriously than she used to work, and that she trusted her painstaking would be proportionately rewarded with improvement.

She certainly did work much more slowly —so slowly, indeed, that could his or anybody else's eyes have constantly overlooked her in her simple privacy, she would really have seemed not to work at all. What, would have been thought, had come over that once facile, fluent, never-halting pen ? It remained for minutes, for quarters, for hours, suspended and indolent, in her hand. The thoughts must have suddenly waxed strangely luggard. And she herself, whom Hannah had declared to "work from morning till night, till there never seemed no end of it," what had come over her that the little chair before the writing-table stood vacant sometimes forenoon after forenoon, whilst she, its former faithful occupant, sat listless by the open window whence the prospect

was so limited, or restlessly wandered up and down the rough, uncared-for square of grass outside, until her feet must have ached again? It was only when the distant church tower of Batterton tolled thrice that she seemed to regain something of her vivacity of movement—that the step grew more elastic, the eye more bright, the interest on the face more wakeful. Then she would mount to her little bedroom, and, before half an hour had gone, descend in her riding costume, and seem more like the Rosie of the departed summer months.

To-day, however, though three o'clock had long since stricken, and four had come and gone, and five was close at hand, and the sun was setting behind the crimson woods with a still more crimson background of its own, she mounted not to her tiny chamber, but still remained below, now pacing up and down the confined plat, now sitting by the glass door, but always unoccupied yet seemingly restless throughout.

She might have been expecting some one to drop from the skies, for her eyes were constantly being raised upwards with a long, anxious gaze, the longer and the more anxious as the sunlight died altogether out among the branches, and the evening haze of autumn invaded the air which it had abandoned. Her brow knitted and her lips contracted as the mist—"Detestable mist!" she said aloud—gained ground and seemed to close in about the cottage. No Sir Everard had come that day; but clearly she had not expected him.

What a world of waiting was written on her face! At length she took out her watch and held it in her hand, without stirring, for ten minutes. Then, she replaced it, crossed the enclosure, entered the thicket, and made straight for a point in the wood, close at hand, where four cross-paths struck out all but sheer to the four points of the compass. She looked eagerly along the one that ran

through a long lovely vista of every-coloured foliage to the east.

"She comes! she comes!" she exclaimed. "Red and round, round and red. I knew she would conquer."

She spoke but of the October moon which, that night at full, had just dawned on the mist, and which, though yet low and enveloped in haze, had the defiant redness that, displayed on the horizon, augurs well for a paler but brighter splendour in the dome.

She hurried back to the cottage, almost leaped up the staircase, and shut herself in her room. Shortly she descended, fully equipped for a moonlight ride.

She had not long to wait. Soon came the welcome thud of hoofs, and soon the ringing voice of Sir Everard.

"Now, Rosie! The moon has declared in our favour, the night is all that could be desired, and we shall have the loveliest ride in the world."

He lifted her lightly into her saddle, as lightly bounded into his, and away they went into the moonlit woodlands.

"If the fairies do not dance to-night, I shall believe in them no more. Surely we shall see them. An we do, will we not dismount, and foot a fantastic measure with them? Hark! do you not hear their musicians, the white screech-owls tuning up? Heavens! how lovely! Let us pull up."

Just as he spoke, and he expected her to rein in her horse as he was reining in his own, the chestnut swerved right against him, gave a great bound in the air, and before he had time to think, Rosie and her horse were forty yards ahead of him, and tearing away at full speed. She had kept her seat splendidly, and he had seen enough of her management of a bridle to feel quite sure that her pulling up the runaway was but a question of time and distance. She had a good straight three-quarters of a mile, without break or fence or gate, to do it in, and there

was not the slightest fear of her not doing it. He urged his own horse again into a rapid canter. He could see her distinctly ahead, for the path swerved nor right nor left; but the light was not strong enough for him to know whether as yet she was slackening pace or not. At last, however, he saw not only that he was gaining on her, but that she had turned and was walking her horse leisurely back to him. She was flushed and palpitating with the mingled surprise, exercise, and exertion, and for the first time in his eyes, looked really beautiful. Moonlight, too, is very kind to women.

"What on earth was it?"

"The fairies you spoke of, I suppose," she answered, taking off her hat, shaking back her curls, and arranging what really was not ruffled. "Did you not see them?"

"See what?"

"Two women."

"Two women! Certainly not. I saw nobody, and, indeed, nothing to account for

your start, except that brute's good temper, against which I have warned you more than once."

"That is nothing. Indeed, I enjoyed the gallop. But do you mean to say you saw nobody?"

"There was nobody to see, Rosie."

"I assure you, Sir Everard, there was."

"Nonsense."

"I saw them as distinctly as I see you."

"What were they like?"

"That I cannot tell you. But you know how on occasions like this, if you are startled, or tumble, or anything happens to you hurriedly, you see things quite clearly for a second, though of course not long enough for you to be able to observe them and give a detailed account of their appearances. But they were there, most certainly. Shall we go back and see?"

"No, it is not worth while. If you are very sensitive on the subject, I will believe that you saw rightly, though I have a strong

suspicion they were bracken stalks and branches with fantastic moonlight upon them."

"I assure you they were real women."

"Then they were. They were witches, probably come on purpose to present you with that broom you have been wishing for so long."

"If I thought that, nothing should prevent me from going back and getting it from them."

"You will not want it to-night, unless you prefer the top of a chimney to the bottom of it."

"What do you mean? I do not understand you."

I have a strong suspicion that she did, and guessed pretty correctly what was coming.

"That we sup together to-night by the library fire. The Hold invites you to that comfortable meal which I, for one, have not had for years. But we have turned the day topsy-turvy, and as we have inverted our

riding and resting hours, I thought I might as well invade the regularity of the remainder. Will you come?"

"I shall be delighted, you know," she answered, with a tenderness in her voice that did not escape him.

She was unwise. She was only strengthening a resolve which he had that day taken. She too, however, had taken hers; and it remained to see which resolve would ride down the other.

"What a pity we cannot have those two witches to supper! We should be such a charming *parti carré*."

"Perhaps we are better without them; they would gobble it all up, and leave us nothing."

"But they could provide any amount more, dish after dish, done by some aërial Francatelli, and coming steaming hot down the chimney, and hey, presto! self-laid on the table, and the covers invisibly whipped

off and disappearing up the chimney again. You do not know them as well as I do. You have evidently no faith in them."

"As much as you have in my two women."

"Two women!" and he laughed. "No, I don't believe in *them*."

Rosie's eyes, however, had not deceived her. Two women, who had been walking slowly through the wood, one leaning on the arm of the other, had been about to cross one path from north to south, just as they were riding across the other from west to east, and Sir Everard, struck by the beauty caused by the freer flood of light where the roads crossed each other, had told Rosie to pull up.

"Another metre, ma'm'selle, and we were crushed."

"I wish we had been, Marie," the other answered, still in French.

"God forbid, ma'm'selle! You are tired?"

"Very tired, Marie."

"Let us rest. We can sit here. It is quite dry."

"O yes! and if it is not, what does it matter? Except for you, dear Marie. I should not like you to be ill, or catch cold for my sake."

"Dear angel, I would be ill for ever for your sake, and be content. See, sit here; here, is better. On the cloak. Is it not ravishing?"

"Too ravishing, Marie."

There was silence. One looked out on space, and the other looked at her. At last she said:

"Let us go back, Marie."

"No! let us go forward. Courage! It must be done."

"Come, then. We will go at once."

"What a funny hour for people to ride!"

"Not in England . . . I wonder if——"

"What, ma'm'selle?"

"Nothing, Marie. Did you remark them?"

"I was too much occupied caring for you, ma'm'selle. I was almost stupified by the horses. Did *you* remark them?"

"No: I was thinking of something else. Do I tire you?"

"Not at all. Lean more—more."

Meanwhile Sir Everard and his companion had ridden in and out and out and in of grassy paths, pool-dotted glades, through gates already sparkling with the drops of settled mist, past copse and hedge-row and turnip-field, and again into dense groves where the thick green bracken mounted almost to where the thinning sere leaves began; richest autumn moonlight suffusing and making magical them all.

"Are we here already?"

"Yes; there is the house. Are you not hungry?"

"Not very; but I have enjoyed my ride

more than anything that ever happened to me in my life."

"That's all right. *That* turn, Rosie. Here we are, you see."

The groom was standing at the door, They dismounted and entered.

"This way. I do not think I showed you the library before."

It was a good sized room, but not too large to be comfortable. There were closely-packed dark oak shelves nearly all round, even in the doorways, so that when once in you could not guess, without close examination, where the entrance was. In the few breaks where there were no shelves, there were portraits of the same type as those in the gallery up-stairs. A magnificent wood fire was glowing and crackling, and sparkling in and out on some old but bright shields that were hung under a portrait, immediately opposite, of a man in complete armour of the period, seen at once by a con-

noisseur to correspond with them. Two small tables were laid, and both not far from the fire; one with substantial supper, the other with only fruit and glass and flowers.

As you stood on the hearth with your back to the blaze, the window—a folding one—was on your right, and monopolised nearly all that, the much shorter, side of the room. It opened outwards, about a couple of feet from the ground, and was wide open now. Outside were dark leaves and the moonlight. Rosie, after looking round, walked towards it.

"How charming still to have the companion of our ride. There she is, bright and beautiful as ever."

"I ordered supper in here for that very purpose. The house, and, therefore, the windows of the other sitting-rooms, look west or south-west. This is the only one that looks south-east, being at the extreme end; and I knew the moon would have got

round sufficiently for us by supper-time. It will be still better afterwards. Let us begin. I am hungry as a hunter."

He fell at once into the playful rattling mood such as she had seen him in but once before, and that on the occasion of her previous visit to The Hold, when she had been his guest at dinner. He was full of joke and sparkle, and overflowed with easy pleasant banter. When the more solid part of their meal was concluded, the small square table at which it had been despatched was wheeled noiselessly away and disappeared; and only the other remained, with its beautiful pyramids of autumn's richest fruits, bearing the bloom that summer, younger and less wise, gives only to her transitory flowers, its bright clear decanters with their gold and purple contents, and its tapering thin wine-glasses, grateful to both hand and lip, no less than to the eye. Upon this one solitary object of modern elegance and

comfort, amid the large dark setting of oak and vellum backs and dusty canvas of the big baronial room, the light of the joyous pine-blaze seemed to fall and glow with especial favour. Like it, Sir Everard still glowed and crackled, but the object upon which he wished his gleams to fall, would not, somehow, take the light. Quiet herself to-night, Rosie seemed strikingly uninfluenced by his more radiant and half boisterous spirits. She sat very still, slowly tearing off the velvet skin of a peach as moist within as it was dry and firm without. What would rouse her, he wondered?

He started up from the table, hummed a bravura, and walked rapidly to the darkest end of the room (parallel to, and therefore farthest from the window), where stood an instrument not often touched, yet sufficiently in condition for the few chords that accompanied the song into which he broke.

"Softly, Marie!" whispered a voice out-

side, behind the left half of the large open window. "Softly, Marie! he is going to sing."

"I did not know you played, Sir Everard," exclaimed Rosie.

"Back, Marie! there is some one with him."

"Nor do I," he answered. "I know just enough to accompany a strain like this:

Behind the curtain,
With glance uncertain,
Peeps pet Florence as I gaily ride;
Scarce demurely,
Though quite purely,
But most surely
Wishing she were riding, riding by my side.

In leafy alleys,
Where sunlight dallies,
Pleasant were it, bonnie, to be riding rein by rein;
And where summer tosses
All about in bosses
Velvet verdant mosses,
Still more pleasant, surely, to dismount us and remain.

O thou beauty,
Hanging ripe and fruity
By the scented window in the drooping eve!
Whisper from the casement
If that blushing face meant—
At the cottage basement,
Gallant! halt! I come to thee, I come to never leave!

But if thy long lashes
Sway for whoso dashes
Past thy fragrant lintel in the waning light,
Close the lattice, sweetest!
Darkness were discreetest,
And with bridle fleetest,
I will gallop onwards, unattended, through the night.

What do you think of that, Rosie?" he asked gaily, rising from the instrument, returning to the table near the fire, where she had remained sitting as he sang, and taking up a bunch of opal grapes, the reward of his exertions. "What do you think of that?"

"It is—is—very—very——"

Her head fell, and she raised her hand to her forehead, letting it slope like a sunshade over her eyes.

"What is it, Rosie?"

There was no answer; only lower went the little head, and lower the little hand. He did not see it, but a tear fell on the untasted peach, and another on the Castle of Ehrenbreitstein pictured on the enamelled dessert-plate.

"Are you unwell, Rosie?" he asked, approaching her.

The left hand moved not, but the other, holding a tiny handkerchief, came up from her lap, crept under it, and remained pressed against her eyes. She was sobbing. He kindly put his arm round her.

"Look, Marie, look! Back! they may turn and see us."

"Tell me, Rosie! what is it? Did my innocent little song upset you?"

"No—no—not that. It is nothing—nothing. I am a little fool; that is all."

She rose from the table, shook back her curls, and strove to prevent any more tears from coming.

"It is only that I have been very happy here, very, very happy, and I must leave it."

"Leave the cottage?" he said, with sufficient presence of mind, even in her trouble, to leap at the idea.

He had fully made up his mind to tell her to-night of his intention of soon going abroad again. She was sparing him the disagreeable task. Most men—so awfully, cruelly, pitilessly selfish are they with women who give them the chance—would have said, "Why must you go?" just in order to drag out of her what they would have supposed the, to her crushing, but to them complimentary, secret. But he, loyal gentleman that he was, suggested only such words as might enable her to all appearances to preserve her secret, if there was one, whilst suggesting a plausible motive for her departure.

"Leave the cottage, you mean?"

"Yes, the cottage"—and the tears seemed coming afresh—"the cottage, and the woods, and the—the—all that has been so delicious!"

"Summers *will* go, Rosie," he said, trying to make for her another outlet, "however pleasant they may be."

"Ah! but summer will return, but these dear departed days—never."

As he was so far resolved that they never should, he could not follow her where she had so dexterously followed him. As quickly as could be expected, he tried another path.

"Batterton woods must be dreary enough in winter, though I never spent one at The Hold. At the cottage you would be frozen or moistened to death."

"I could be happy there all the year round."

"When are you thinking of leaving? I suppose you want to go to town to make arrangements about bringing out your book. Is it finished?"

"Not yet; and I scarcely know when it will be. I work so badly now."

"I thought you were working so much better."

"For a time I did, but not recently. Let

me go, Sir Everard!" and she turned to look for her riding-hat. "I cannot stay. I am not fit to stay."

"I am sorry you should go so soon. You know I shall shortly be going abroad." She knew nothing of the kind, except by intuition, for he had never said so: but she made no remark. "I shall shortly be going abroad, and I thought this would be a sort of pleasant last night of a very pleasant time, during which I have met with immense comfort from you, Rosie, for which I shall be grateful to the last day of my life. Must you really go?"

"Yes, really."

"At once?"

"Please. But you must not come with me."

"But I must. I could not think of letting you go home alone."

"Cannot the groom come?"

"He can, but he shall not, except on foot,

in order to bring your horse back. You really must tolerate my escort."

Suddenly, as a storm-shower, came the tears in right good earnest, broken with poor half-formed, yet too intelligible, words.

"O, I am so sorry—so sorry—to go. I cannot tell how—how happy I have been. And you—you—you have been so—so—so generously kind. How I shall miss you! I am spoiled—spoiled—living in your light so long! and now—darkness—utter, miserable darkness!"

She raised her head, she let it fall back, she looked at him—up at him—with her tear-moistened grey eyes; no, blue now through the tears; no, not with her eyes even at all, but with her soul only through her eyes, and said, in one long, deep breath:

"You will not forget me, will you?"

He put his arms gently upon rather than round her, in a frank, masculine way of mingled pity and tenderness, but of tender-

ness that evidently sprung solely from the sentiment of loyal amity, saying as he did so:

"Forget you, Rosie! Of course not. We will always be friends."

But whether it was that weeping made her weak, or that she was too near a heart not to be nearer which was hell, or that even amid all her woe she never forgot a woman's weapons, certain it is that she accepted the manly gesture for more than it was meant, buried her head in his breast, and leaned there sobbing. He could not take away his arms or himself; it would have been brutal, and she must have fallen. And then touch has always in it something electric. If we are stricken, we must strike; and if we are pressed, must we not press in return? He bent his head over her, and quietly and purely kissed her curls, murmuring very low, so low, perhaps, that scarce she could hear him:

"Poor Rosie! I wish you would not weep."

"Look, Marie, look! For the love of Heaven, Marie! see! see! Lead me away, Marie! lead me away!"

END OF VOL. II.

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